Homeward bound

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Homeward bound

by Joseph_Amadeus

Summary

Will Graham left the FBI behind with the much appreciated help from Alana Bloom. He fosters Abigail and a group of troubled kids.
Hannibal Lecter lived his best life in Baltimore, visiting his family in Lithuania once a year. His parents had his sister very late in life and Hannibal adores her. One year he made it home for Christmas too late and discovered his parents murdered and his sister locked up in the cellar. Unable to help Mischa with her trauma and following Alana's advice, he takes Mischa to Will, known for his unconventional approach towards dealing with trauma.

Notes

Hello. This here deals with a lot of trauma and heavily criticises the neurotypical approach to dealing with neurodivergence. I hope it will read true and genuine. I'm open to polite concrit.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Prologue: Will

In the beginning, naturally, everything went to hell, but quietly and slowly - so slowly in fact that it took Will quite some time to realise what was happening. In his defense, Will spent most of his time inside his head, choosing to mostly ignore the world around him if it involved people. Once he allowed himself to notice people, there wasn't any end to it. He drowned in their feelings which rarely turned out to be even remotely nice.

It was safer, he had decided early on, to be by himself.

Will's mother left him when he was very young. Will's father stayed physically, but mentally he was somewhere on the way to the bottom of a bottomless bottle, proverbial naturally. Will's father did all he could, of course. He kept his boy fed, even if barely, and dressed, however badly. In time Will understood that his father had done his best. He'd never felt any anger or bitterness towards the man who had to live through a heartbreak and addiction while striving to keep his son alive. There wasn't much connection, but unlike the vast majority of parents, Will's father left his son to do as he saw fit. Will saw fit to study hard, read books by the dozen and take care of every stray dog that came his way. He couldn't afford to keep them back then, but he'd read everything he could find about dog care and veterinary medicine, so he sent them back into the world healthy and maybe a bit dangerous. At least he hoped they'd be dangerous so that no one could ever harm them again. The goodness of one's heart proved to be a poor protection, as Will witnessed a lot among his peers.

He had to change schools a lot, since his father was always on the move in search of work and maybe, just a bit, Will's mother. Still, once settled down, if it could be called so, he'd go and get himself a library card and some books. After a few incidents, he had his father write him a letter which said in perfectly crude wording that Will could read anything he wanted. Will had to rewrite the damn thing. His father felt very guilty, but was impressed with Will's skill in copying his handwriting and polishing up his rhetoric. Will would show the letter to a librarian in case the librarian remained unobliging.

He loved books about fishing and boat mechanics. He loved books about insects and mushrooms. He loved books about building a house and starting a garden.

He loved reading about the workings of the human mind most of all. Fiction didn't make much sense, the beauty of Proust's flow and Wilde's style notwithstanding. Science fiction was nice - the ideas there stunning. Psychology books were the best, however, particularly and especially those that spoke about different minds, the minds Will found easier to relate to, could recognise and not just mirror as it happened with almost every person he'd ever met.

He loved working with his father in boatyards and he loved telling his father about everything he was doing wrong, according to a book. Will's father got so mad once that for a while he wanted to write his own book about boat motors, for fuck's sake. In a way, he did. That book remained in Will's head along with thousands and thousands of other books.

And somehow, in his last school, an occupational advisor looked at him, an underfed boy with blue eyes and messy curls, a bookworm, a boatyard mechanic, a self taught vet, and recommended he join the police. At that moment, having felt nothing but overwhelming and self-righteous pity emanating from the woman, and having stared at her with the quiet animosity, Will hoped she'd recognise the danger he might have posed, had she known how easily he could understand terrible cruelty and equally terrible mercy.

Will pondered over it still. Looking back, he could acknowledge that he agreed because he could finally have some power. And a gun. Maybe he could make things better for some other kid… Maybe he was allowing that woman's opinion of him to influence his decision.

He excelled at the academy and was just about to have a brilliant career, but however brilliant he was at solving the crimes, he was terrible at apprehending the criminals, which soon resulted in him being shot.

By that time he had won a scholarship in the Georgetown university and metaphorically sailed in that direction.

Said direction eventually brought him to the FBI academy where he taught forensic psychology. His attempt at becoming a full blown agent was fully blown away by his failure to pass the psychological evaluation. He was considered too unstable, that is, he could read the room so well and hoped that it could be so impressive, that the psychiatrist in charge told him he was uncanny, pardon, unstable.

He bought himself a lonely house in Wolf Trap, Virginia, and collected no less than six stray dogs. He hoped his father's ghost would haunt him a bit about it but it didn't happen, and probably, it was for the best.

One day a surly man came into his class, said hello, asked to borrow Will's imagination and touched Will's glasses without a second thought or at least a request for Will's consent. Why Will, by then an established authority, the author of a standard monograph about insect activity being awfully useful for establishing the time of death, followed that surly man, that Jack Crawford like a puppy, he didn't know. Or he did, but couldn't tell. He never did well with bullies, too afraid of letting himself go and beating a bully to a pulp. He was physically capable of it - dainty and thin as he was, he was a strong man and a vicious fighter when it came to rolling around with his dogs.

That was how he was hired as a consultant for the BAU.

Next thing he knew he was standing in the bloody kitchen of a serial killer who had murdered and eaten eight girls. The killer was stuffed with ten bullets and his beloved daughter was bleeding out on the floor. His wife had been pushed out of the door, half dead already and screaming for help. Will couldn't help her but he did his best to help Abigail.

On his way back from Minnesota Will adopted his seventh stray and named him Winston.

It got curiouser and curiouser after that, although none of it was Winston's fault. Winston still looked at Will with sad and guilty eyes, but he was a dog, he couldn't help it.

Throughout his academic career, Will got to know and kind of befriended one Dr Alana Bloom. She was a kind and gentle woman who could barely suppress her urge to mother Will into oblivion. Will used to have a crush on her, up until the moment he realised that she was trying to mother him. He decided to concentrate on the male aspect of his bisexuality, not that it was that much different from the female aspect. He crushed on someone, he pined for a while and he moved on. Sometimes he had sex. He found both sex and cuddles awfully suffocating. And besides his dogs would look at him with sad and guilty eyes.

Nevertheless, Alana had become a good friend - and she unleashed her mother bear powers upon Jack Crawford from the start. She warned Jack and Will about the dangers of sending someone like Will, someone who felt *everything* into the thick of it. Of course she was dismissed by Jack, but she made Will think - oh, he didn't have much time to think, Jack made sure of it.

Before long Will was hallucinating, lost time, compromised crime scenes and was in general considered a useful nuisance.

He visited Abigail and tried to bond with her - out of guilt, loneliness or suddenly awoken fatherly instincts, who knew. Will certainly didn't.

Alana kept raging at Jack and stopped raging at Will. He loved being powerful, solving cases, saving lives, as Jack put it.

Some compromised crime scenes ended up with some of his lures having parts and pieces of victims, so Jack did the so called right thing and took Will to Dr Frederick Chilton who had been eager to get his smarmy unethical hands on Will's head for some time. That visit ended up with Will being locked up under Dr Chilton's *care* in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

And in Will's encephalitis being discovered. Well, at least Dr Chilton made sure Will got the proper care for that.

Alana blew up like Will's law enforcement career. She was a righteous woman, and despite her urge to transform any different thing into any ordinary thing, she had a keen sense of justice. Will wasn't aware enough or lucid enough to know it, but he learned everything soon enough.

Alana drove over Jack Crawford who wanted to pick Will up from the fucking insane asylum he had put him in in the first place. To drag him to another crime scene, naturally.

Alana dusted her pretty coat and said *ooops.* And walked into the building to pick Will up herself. She successfully claimed temporary insanity afterwards, and even allowed her and Will's lawyers to twist their relationship into a love affair. She didn't care and she was seeing a lovely woman at the time, who, having been subjected to the abuse of her brother through most of her life, understood the importance of being discreet for the greater good.

Alana kept raging until she sued both the FBI and Dr Chilton personally, then, since she was feeling like it and still had some rage that needed proper expression, sued the psychiatry board too, for the fun of it. Suddenly Will found himself a rich man with seven dogs and a

very pretty, very polite, very politely feral friend. Alana did need a cause to fight for more than anything else - probably because she had everything else.

So her next mission was to grant Will the right to be Abigail's foster parent. For all her support and encouragement of the system, Alana clearly saw that the system couldn't help the girl whose father had used her as a bait to lure in eight Abigail's doubles and proceeded to cook them to perfection.

That was how Will ended up with his first human stray.

Alana couldn't be stopped, so while Will was teaching Abigail to fish, sew and build tree houses as well as swings; to repair cars and boats, to forage mushrooms and berries and garden like a pro, Alana kept fighting, well, raging.

A quiet man, Peter Bernadone, ended up working at Will's farm - Will didn't even know he had one, but ok. Peter had gotten kicked by a horse in the stables he had been working at, and then had been manipulated by his serial killer of a social worker into believing he had killed a dozen or more women.

Will agreed that horses, sheep and every creature great and small deserved a loving home, so yes, now he had a farm.

Jimmy Price, a clever, intelligent forensic pathologist in the BAU, decided he'd had enough of the FBI, and moved in to home school a shit load of troubled kids, a steady supply of which Alana guaranteed. His husband Brian Zeller, also of the BAU, followed and remained unnoticed by Will, since he did nothing to contribute and didn't bother Will.

Beverly Katz, same fate, followed those too and helped Jimmy with homeschooling, although she loved Will's survival lessons and enjoyed cutting wood as therapy, seeing as BAU was no more and Jack Crawford was spending his savings on lawyers.

And that's how it went. That was how Will crept out of hell and discovered he could be useful to so many kids, so many people. He didn't think about it, he didn't have to. Alana did everything, be it a grant, funding, paperwork or anything else. Will let her do her thing and he did his. It was good. It was just as it was in the beginning of every word other than his own.

He gave each new kid a tool box, a sewing kit and let them do anything other than harming other kids, unless said kids were asking for it. His purpose was, in the end, to teach each kid enough skills to have them build a tiny house for themselves by the end of their stay with Will. It was Abigail's idea. They had to find materials by themselves by scavenging any garbage they could find, be it a car, a palette, discarded furniture and so forth. They had so much fun scavenging! And Will liked staying on top of all things reuse-recycle and the likes. His father would have been proud.

They totally build a three mast ship in Will's yard just for the fun of it.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

CW brief description of canon typical violence

Prologue: Hannibal

Hannibal Lecter was born happy and with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was born in Lithuania, the love child of the old Lithuanian aristocracy and old Italian aristocracy - his mother was a Sforza. The Lecters survived the worst of the Soviet occupation and influence and remained rich. Their estate thrived and their son was a miracle. Their love was calm and sure, which was a first for some time in the Lecter family. That love somewhat calmed Hannibal's father and he reached out and connected with his younger brother Robertas, a late child of a loveless marriage, spoiled and capricious and married to a Japanese princess, of all things.

So, when the virgin woods around the Lecter estate and the knowledge of his parents ceased to suffice his endlessly curious nature, Hannibal moved to Paris to live with his aunt and uncle and enjoy every privilege his position and wealth allowed, or so everyone thought.

Hannibal's parents stayed behind, happy and in love, even if their love turned obsessive and jealous in the absence of their son.

Hannibal was too polite to complain about the horrors of his boarding school - so polite in fact that he stopped talking (and there was little he loved more than talking) - but when the truth came out, Robertas and his wife, lady Murasaki, made sure that school remained closed and the management - enclosed in their lonely cells.

He moved to Florence to study medicine and art; his anatomical drawings gained him an internship in Johns Hopkins, and he thrived.

After all, when left unattended, Hannibal yearned for more beauty and more knowledge.

He became an ER surgeon, and when it became too much, he switched to psychiatry effortlessly. He seemed to have inherited both the good looks and the good luck of his family, so before long he was a celebrated psychiatrist, just as he had been a celebrated surgeon before.

He was a treasure of the Baltimore high society, a patron of the arts, an admirer of opera and ballet and every exhibit worthy of his attention for it was his attention any art exhibit sought. He didn't use any of his family fortune, being quite capable of earning more than enough.

And every December he'd visit his parents in their estate, having paid his respect to his aunt and uncle in Paris.

It was a good life. One of plenty, one of meaning, even if the meaning wasn't all he hoped for it to be. Hannibal hadn't met someone of equal intelligence yet, and he was too polite to let everyone know that no one could compare to him, but it was a polite thing to do, after all, to never show his powers, to never show how little he thought of everyone in the room with him.

Most of his clientele were rich people with nothing to complain about (unless their spouses were abusive - then Hannibal could match his mentee Dr Alana Bloom in grinding those people through the legislative shredder) and some patients whom Alana referred to him.

Hannibal was mostly happy. Sometimes, well, often he got bored with his acquaintances, but then he could cook for them and make a show of his skills and thus he could indulge in talking about various dishes and their history. He'd never had an equal, so he never missed one. Even Alana couldn't live up to his expectations. She was too boring, too normal, while Hannibal was interested in those whose minds took them on long hopeless trips into the unknown and forbidden.

His imagination, his hunger for knowledge, his interest in all things unusual, his rich family history - all of it led him to seek the most extraordinary company, although he had learned early on that anyone claiming they were extraordinary tended to have nothing extraordinary to offer. None whatsoever.

Still, he remained engaging. His love life remained such as well. Perhaps he tended to be too smart when talking to someone he'd just reduced to moans and grunts…

Sometimes a piece of art, of music or *Frozen* lived up to his expectations, not that he would ever admit to the last one…

That is until one day when he was forty and established. That day his parents informed him that he was about to have a sister.

His mother was bashful and his father was lost and a bit too crass, but Hannibal decided he'd be the best brother in history, which led to him being chided for worrying too much. Lithuania was a European country, everything was under control and he had nothing to worry about.

He held his baby sister in his arms one day in December and swore to protect her with everything he had. He gave her a private jet for her first birthday and was chided himself for using his wealth for such useless things.

And that was how he lived and how he loved and how he shopped. His mother hoped he'd marry Alana, and he and Alana laughed about it and fell into bed once. They ended up talking about the latest case the FBI called her to consult on and it featured one Will Graham quite a lot.

Alana asked, nay demanded, that Hannibal use his influence to declare the brother of Alana's lover insane so that said lover could finally take over the family business of meat packaging, but Hannibal refused because he had a soft spot for pathologies, especially those far removed from him.

That year, the year his beloved Mischa turned ten, Hannibal stayed in Paris for Christmas since his favourite conductor was performing on Christmas Eve. Hannibal's mother wished him good luck in bedding said conductor and Hannibal pretended to blush.

He arrived at his family estate to discover two unknown people feasting on the food his mother had cooked. His parents' corpses rotted nearby and his sister was locked up in the cellar, because, as those two drunken men proclaimed, they weren't monsters.

What happened afterwards, Hannibal couldn't recall. He came to to two more corpses, gorged upon and mutilated beyond recognition, and his own hands and teeth bloody. He realised he must have eaten some of his parents' meat too.

He rushed to the cellar to let his sister go, and she was… She was as fine as could be expected of a ten-year-old girl who'd been locked in the cellar for who knew how long.

She welcomed him with a hug and she remained calm and steadfast while Hannibal called the authorities and Alana who flew into Lithuania to sort it all for Hannibal.

His aunt's ward Chiyoh flew in too and helped Alana through the mess that followed the deadly Christmas which marked Hannibal's fifty first year.

Once they were cleared to leave, Hannibal took Mischa shopping for anything she wanted, then they boarded the plane for Baltimore, first class seats of course.

Mischa wasn't exactly chatty, but she talked to Hannibal, albeit minimally, and she even smiled a few times. She was doing well, all things considered, and Hannibal loved her so much…

The moment they entered his house in Baltimore, Mischa shut down. She stopped talking and stopped eating. She didn't sleep either. Hannibal had to make sure she got her fluids and he had to fight her through it all, feeling as if he had been her tormentor as he injected her with a sedative and administered an intravenous infusion of sugars.

Hannibal didn't have to work to make ends meet, so he quickly referred each and every one of his patients to someone else but no matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, in the end of the day he had to wrestle with his sister to subdue her and get her body to receive what it needed by any means possible.

He tried sleeping next to Mischa in her newly decorated room; and he tried taking Mischa with him to his own bedroom; he tried being firm and he tried being gentle.

Mischa remained unresponsive, madly angry when he tried to feed her or hold her.

He let Alana try and help because Alana was always hungry for someone she could help - and thus they ended up talking about Will Graham once again - but Mischa had a panic attack and Alana and Hannibal had to spend a night in the ER before it could he said that at least physiologically Mischa was alright.

Alana looked at Hannibal and Hannibal contemplated his three piece suit and a cup of what could never be called coffee.

If Hannibal could have his way, he'd have grown coffee beans on his window sill, roasted them in his kitchen… He did make sure he had a midnight snack of artfully cut tropical fruit

at hand. In all honesty, Hannibal would have remade the world anew, to suit his tastes and preferences better, to be able to slow down time or turn it backwards. It had been true even before Mischa's ordeal but it was even truer in the aftermath.

"They will take her away," Alana said finally.

"They can't."

"They can and they will."

Hannibal glared at her, some of his possessive darkness showing through his maroon eyes, that same darkness that led him to kill and maim; that seemed all the more exhilarating since he couldn't remember what he did, but he could feel an echo of gory satisfaction the moment he came to his senses.

Alana shuddered and swallowed. "Please," she said.

"Please what, Alana?"

"I know you want to do something… Terrible with anyone who'd come between you two but for all your brilliance and intelligence, you can't help her."

"Alana, I believe you co-authored an essay with me, didn't you? The one about the history of psychiatry, remember? The conclusion we both came to was that psychiatry, unlike other fields of medicine, couldn't be compared to a map whose blank spaces are filled along the way. If anything, psychiatry is a set of vague descriptions and even vaguer instructions that change far too often, depending on the times."

"What are you trying to say?" Alana frowned and crossed her arms.

"I'm saying that taking her away, pumping her with sedatives and letting her rot in some hospital would do nothing for either scientific advancement or her personal recovery."

"As you know, most of our colleagues would blame that same vagueness you've just mentioned for the lack of any other option."

"I do know that." Hannibal paced the sterile floor and grit his teeth. Most of his life, the universe favoured him, as if he had been Goethe, infinitely precious to the world, worthy of the divine flirtation that one's hunt for knowledge inspired in nature.

"There was a teenage boy a few years ago who set most of the houses in his neighbourhood on fire. A budding arsonist, he was. Quite an artist too, not that his foster parents cared for it…"

"I don't see where this is going, but I would have."

"You would. I made sure he ended up with Will. The boy is a very successful pyrotechnician now. Works in Hollywood."

"And?"

"There is another boy who couldn't connect with parents or peers in any way, so he tried turning his family into a mushroom garden. Buried them in the backyard and tried to foster a connection via mycelium. Concerned neighbours reacted swiftly, so no one died. The boy is growing mushrooms at Will's farm now and there's always someone ready to listen to him, although it's damn hard to understand him.

"There's also a girl whose father was a serial killer who ate his victims. She thrives with Will too.

"There's an autistic girl who was rejected by her birth family, as well by a few foster families. She spends her time sitting on Will's porch, happy. She doesn't talk and doesn't connect in a conventional way, but Will told me that to her, it's hanging out with her numerous friends."

"Are you saying that I should let Will foster Mischa? That I should give up on her?" Hannibal loomed over Alana, handsome and impeccable and polite and absolutely terrifying.

"I'm saying that should you allow me to handle it, you could take Mischa to Will and let him try and help her. It would definitely be better than any institution she might end up in."

"It would still mean that I'm leaving her. How would she feel?"

"We don't know and we can't tell."

Hannibal bit his lip. Alana thought that she had never truly understood her friend and mentor. There was something inhuman about him, be it his looks, his mind or his behaviour. At the moment, however, biting his thin lip, he was the most human she'd ever seen him, and she wanted to help him, just as she always did.

"Alright. Would you please be so kind as to handle it?" Hannibal asked, polite and casual, maroon eyes cold and distant. Alana considered persuading him to spend some time at Will's place too, but there was no way Hannibal would agree to live on a farm. She suddenly pictured Hannibal petting a sheep. It was an endearing image.

Chapter 3

Act 1: et in inferno ego

"A psychiatrist?" Will poured Alana some tea.

"What is it?" Alana cut to the chase because that was certainly not oolong.

"Some shit Eldon grows?" Will looked into the cup. "It's ok, not hallucinatory, very nutritious."

"I don't trust you when you say it's not hallucinatory. You still don't know that Brian lives here." Alana took a careful sip. It was fine. Suspiciously so.

"And I still choose to ignore him. He doesn't bother anyone, doesn't do anything… Maybe he doesn't want to be noticed. I surely don't." Will shrugged.

A tall burly girl walked into the kitchen. Her hair was glorious and braided in it were scraps of metal which she might be capable of using as a weapon. Alana looked at her with envy she decided to acknowledge. "Ada, your hair is fantastic."

"And your coat is very pretty, Dr Bloom," Ada replied easily and turned to Will. "We have that dude we let go last week. Dragged another girl into the woods, pervert. She's alright, we took her home."

Alana looked at Ada, then at Will.

"Oh, Ada and Gill, they…" Will waved about.

"We keep the woods clean," Ada finished menacingly. "No pollution, none whatsoever."

"I can't let you harm him, we have a witness," Will pointed at Alana.

"Maybe you could… deliver him to the police station?" Alana asked meekly.

"Yeah, and they'll put us into jail," Ada answered.

Alana sighed. Ada and Gill were twin sisters who had murdered their abusive parents and ended up with Will because Alana never knew when to quit.

"Put him into my car. He… tripped and fell when I confronted him about his behaviour." Alana sighed again.

"We'll make a good woman out of you yet, doc." Ada smirked, poured herself some mushroom tea and leaned on the kitchen counter.

"Don't you have a bastard to put into my car?" Alana asked.

"I do. Gill was doing it anyway. I thought we'd ask you first."

Alana could see her point.

"Alana wants me to take in a much younger sister of a famed Baltimore psychiatrist," Will explained. "There was a home invasion in their estate in Lithuania, and the girl was locked up in the cellar for some time. Severe PTSD…"

"What the fuck are you thinking of?" Ada asked, indignant. "Take the girl in. She'd been through hell, her brother must be…"

"He murdered the perps. Ate them a bit. Bit off some pieces from the bodies of his parents."

"Yeah, well, good for him!" Ada nodded. "Dr Bloom, bring the girl. Is her brother sexy?"

"He is," Alana replied before realising what she was saying.

"Good. Will needs a lay."

"Oh, he does! He's all crotchety!" Abigail walked in, smelled the air and walked out.

"I don't know what she has against mushrooms." Ada took another sip of her mushroom drink.

On her way out Peter pushed a fluffy rat in Alana's hands. Halfway back to Baltimore she realised that some cuddles from a sweet little rodent was what she needed the most.

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Will Graham loved cars. He mostly loved what was left of those cars when he and his charges could afford to buy them and make them into new vehicles to be sold or driven about.

Will Graham didn't have time for Bentleys, certainly not the one that rolled by his house to let out the epitome of Will's secret wet dreams.

He was tall, immaculate, clean like someone with no dogs; with sharp cheekbones, with mysterious eyes and… and… and…

He opened the back door to carry out a thin girl dressed just as immaculately as her brother.

"I'm sorry, she was uncooperative, so I had to drug her," Hannibal said. Fuck, but he was pretty.

Will shook his head to let his curls fall on his eyes and cover up for his pent up lack of sex life.

"It's ok. Put her down and fuck off," Will said.

"I'm afraid I can't do that. Fucking off," he winced,"that is."

"Go in and have… ehm… something."

Hannibal gingerly and unwillingly put his sister down.

"Take your fucking car away, though," Will instructed and sat next to the girl on the ground. Winston ran out and sat on her other side. And then growled at Hannibal.

Dr Lecter raised his empty and pretty hands. "I mean no harm, I just want her to be alright."

Winston growled again.

Will could feel that Hannibal hated them all already, which was a great start if you needed a lay.

Hannibal walked back and entered the house with all the grace of a royal being all… royal about anything.

Will chose to stay by Mischa and draw abstract figures in the dirt.

Mischa just sat there, until the drugs wore off, and then she stiffened - but remained seated.

It started to rain and Will and Winston stayed by Mischa all the same.

Will couldn't care less about his own discomfort and Winston was kinder than any angel of any Lord.

In the meantime Hannibal found himself somewhat of a hostage to a group of teens who talked to him about serial killers, mushrooms, vicious young men in the woods, martial arts and, honestly, every good thing. Hannibal would have loved their company, if not their tea, on any other day. But he kept staring out of the window, cursing the weather and Will and maybe even Winston.

Early on it became apparent that no one in the room would agree with Hannibal, a totally new experience for Dr Lecter which he was in no condition to enjoy.

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Winston whined gently and tugged at Mischa's sleeve - the sleeve of a beautiful cashmere sweater.

Mischa turned her head suddenly and looked at Winston, really looked.

Will held his breath and didn't say a word. No word would comfort Mischa after all, no human thing would fit. But Winston's care, his worry and his movements, those couldn't be refused, or so Will hoped, but anyway, suddenly Mischa grabbed Winston's neck and stood

up. Winston whined softly and licked her small fingers before bending his neck obediently so that Mischa could grab his nape more surely.

Slowly, Winston started moving towards the house, the main house, since there were plenty of tiny houses built from scavenged materials, after quite a few expeditions to garbage dumps… Winston made his way towards Will's kitchen, messy, dirty and imperfect as it was.

Before long, Mischa was standing in front of her perfect brother and a group of less perfect and just as troubled as she was, teenagers.

Ada silently wrapped a blanket around Mischa's shoulders and Gill pushed a cup of particularly strong mushroom stock/tea into her hands.

"Lie down with my fungi," Eldon said, "and we'll hear you."

"I'll hear her alright just like that," Abigail assured him. "And I can listen to you too," she added more softly.

Eldon muttered something and moved to the stove to make dinner - mushroom based of course but it was their vegetation Wednesday so no one argued.

Hannibal felt he should have done something but Mischa's eyes, blue like Will's and their mother's, seemed more cognizant than ever since the moment Hannibal, bloody and mad, had opened the cellar for her.

Winston whined again and tugged Mischa along. She followed.

"Why didn't I get a blanket?" Will asked like a bitch.

"No severe PTSD?" Gill offered with a smirk.

"I lived among other people," Will argued. Gill nodded and fetched Will a blanket. It looked ratty and bad, but Will accepted it gratefully.

"How about I cook?" Hannibal suggested, surprising even himself. "I'm a very good cook."

"Go on, doctor sexy pants," Ada purred, not at all interested. That was fine. Dr Lecter had always considered a lesbian's appreciation the only one worthy of striving for.

Will huffed and muttered something about traitors which everyone ignored gracefully, so he was free to follow Mischa.

She walked through the house, mostly moving where Winston tugged her, and ended up under Will's bed, snuggled with his oldest dogs and another ratty blanket that Winston adjusted around her.

"She's under my bed," Will informed upon his return to the kitchen. Everyone else appeared to be in a food coma, and Hannibal looked vaguely smug about it.

"What? No!" Hannibal stood up, elegant and dangerous.

"Yes," Will argued as he munched on the leftovers straight from the pan. "She's comfortable and asleep."

"It can't be. She never sleeps unless I…" Hannibal bit his lip.

"It's called a distress kink, I guess," Abigail guessed walking past Will and meaning to pat him on the shoulder before she realised that Will was drenched.

Hannibal ignored them all and walked out, and straight into Will's bedroom where Will followed him to.

"I have a keen sense of smell," Hannibal whispered, straightening up from under Will's bed.

"Good for you. Or bad. Now fuck off, really. I want to take a shower and…"

Will glanced at Hannibal who didn't seem either embarrassed or impressed.

"And what if I need to jerk off?" Will asked.

"With my sister under your bed?"

"It might be difficult but if you stay, it'll be even harder?" Will tried again.

"I believe in you," Hannibal retorted with a sharp smile before sitting down next to Will's bed like a perfectly tailored Buddah, that is no Buddah at all, but still so… sexy. Unlike any other Buddah, mind you.

"This is mean," Will said and started undressing. In his defense he didn't know what effect his antics were having on the poor distressed treasure of Baltimore high society. He just wanted to fall asleep and he found it comforting that someone thought that the underside of his bed was a safe space. He'd be the last person to think so, to be quite honest.

"She hasn't brushed her teeth," Hannibal said in the darkness of the room.

And there was that thing about the darkness, to Will, that made him think that nothing was impossible. Everything was just too damn difficult or impossibly necessary, but not impossible per se.

So he reached out through the gooey darkness - that of fertile soil, that of rest, that of untamed imagination - and fucking messed with Hannibal's ashen blond hair. Will had always had the urge to mess up with perfection - like, maybe, dress Michelangelo's David. And so he played with Hannibal's hair, both of them listening to Mischa's sweet and tranquil breath under Will's bed.

"It's ok, though. She's asleep."

"She doesn't… Routine doesn't calm her."

"You're supposed to be a good psychiatrist, Dr Lecter. No routine is comforting right now. The only routine she had brought her to a nightmare no one has to deal with, ever."

"I can offer her nothing else," Hannibal admitted.

"You did. You brought her here. I'm sure it was hard. I'm sure you're still thinking you're abandoning her. But you're not… You're not."

Hannibal closed his eyes, concentrating on Will's evening breath and Mischa's calm one. The dogs snorted and moved in their sleep. Outside something was wailing and begging for mercy until a girl's stern voice yelled out to shut the fuck up and come fucking inside for fuck's sake.

The girl couldn't have been older than twelve but she sounded confident and something lonely and primal in the woods obeyed her, if the sound of a door open and shut was any indication.

Hannibal felt his chin fall to his chest, felt the sleep numbness overcome him. He'd never let his body dictate its will to his mind, but he was tired and Mischa was safe.

He fell asleep.

***

The morning came in bright and loud and shining. Hannibal woke up to a curious kitten with a toast in its mouth.

The kitten sneaked under the bed.

"Is it a cat?" Will asked.

"I believe it is," Hannibal replied. His body was stiff and terribly ungrateful for the sleep he'd had on the floor and sitting up. Without a shower, mind you.

"No, I don't have any cats here. Not allowed." Will burrowed under the blanket and continued sleeping.

The room door opened a bit and Hannibal saw Abigail.

"Did he see the cat?" She whispered.

"No. I told him there was one, but…"

"Shhhh! No cats. It's Rosemary. She's just a kitten and she's trying to get Winston to play with her. She brought him toast… Oh, look."

Hannibal felt something crawl behind him and he moved to turn around.

Rosemary, Winston and Mischa crawled from under the bed. Rosemary seemed to be in dismay watching Winston place the toast at Mischa's feet.

Mischa picked it up and took a bite.

Hannibal moved to stop her, to say something, but his hand was snatched up. "Hush. She's eating, on her own. They're all healthy and vaccinated. Even those imaginary cats…" Will huffed, then looked at Hannibal, sleep-warm and blue eyed. "It's ok, Hannibal. It's fine. She's eating."

"I don't believe in magic," Hannibal said, barely aware of his whisper.

"It's not magic. It's fucking freedom."

Chapter 4

Act 1: purgatorio

Will decided that Hannibal was a manipulative bastard who cooked his way into the heart of Will's life with one dinner and one breakfast; therefore it made every sense that after breakfast and despite protesting whines from the kitchen about keeping Hannibal forever by any means necessary, Will corralled Hannibal to his Bentley and didn't think how it must have looked from the house where sad teenage faces were plastered to the windows.

"It's nothing personal, really, and you cook well and you're actually not a bad psychiatrist," Will was saying as he somehow ended up with Hannibal, obviously stronger and blindingly obviously taller than Will, between his arms and pushed to his Bentley as if he wanted to be what? Kissed goodbye? He had eaten a few people and his sister needed help and it wasn't even appropriate…

"I mean I wouldn't want to be your patient, but I wouldn't want to be anyone's patient. What I mean to say is that I googled you and Alana brought me some of your writing, and it's really, like really good… But I need you to fuck off. It's for your own benefit. I'm not a psychiatrist, but I've helped a few kids and I can swear I'll do everything I can to help Mischa. I can't promise you I'll succeed but I can promise you that she'll be happy here. You come and visit. You need some time for yourself, you see? It'll do you some good. I'd take you in, but you're neither a stray, nor a weird teenager."

"I'm very weird," Hannibal finally managed to insert a few words of his own. He sounded very offended by Will's supposed notion that Hannibal wasn't weird. "I'm weirder than you, I think."

"Let's not compare our weirdness… Why are you letting me push you into your Bentley? Why am I pushing you into your Bentley?"

"I'm weirder than you," Hannibal replied with triumph. Will moved away as if burnt.

"You know, now is not the right time to flirt. I mean, not with me. Your sister lives under my bed now."

With that Will turned around and walked back to the house. Winston greeted him with understanding and patience, while the rest of his dogs - and children - forlornly followed Hannibal's car with their sad eyes.

"I'll read a cook book!" Will swore.

"Cock block," Eldon muttered.

"I agree, not because I want to, but because it's true," Peter added. "Want to pet a ferret?"

Will did want to pet a ferret. The ferret bit him and Peter called him Cannibal.

"What was his name before?" Will asked while Abigail pretended to be a very effective nurse.

"He didn't have one. Was all… weasley."

"Well, he's a ferret."

***

Hannibal drove to Baltimore and considered writing an essay about…

Oh, damn it, but Goethe wrote a poem about it.

But let it not be said that Hannibal tried to evade a competition with Goethe!

Hannibal felt absolutely torn apart, his emotions running amok - both exhilaration and yearning; fear and happiness. It all melded together, blended, swirled, creating landscapes and rooms of impossible range and colour inside Hannibal's mind palace.

Will was the most beautiful person Hannibal had ever met. His curls, his blue eyes he always turned anywhere but in the direction of the person he was talking with, his elegant and delicate build, his sass, his bitchiness, the fact that Mischa considered his room the safest place…

He had left Mischa there. During those months, ignoring his own nightmares and recovering his memories, he hadn't spent a moment without Mischa by his side. Without being by Mischa's side.

Hannibal felt bile rising in his throat. He kept her close while he couldn't help her. He kept her close to give himself a purpose and a reason to ignore the horrors of his own mind. He had been using her.

And now he had flirted with the man who'd helped her more than Hannibal.

It was tasteless.

Hannibal forced his mind into a state of perfect visual blankness, focusing instead on remembering various renditions of Mozart's 25th Symphony in great detail, playing with the rhythm and style; thinking how Haydn might have written it and how Beethoven would have done it. It lasted him until Baltimore where he walked inside his house and sat on a sofa in the hall and cried.

Alana would definitely either come over or call him soon. Hannibal didn't want her to see him like that. Actually, he didn't want to be like that.

He wrote a quick text to his mentee, then rolled up his sleeves and decided to spring clean the house and cook for the entire Graham household.

***

The problem with being awfully good at everything had never appeared as a problem to Hannibal Lecter, MD. That was how he rolled, as Will would have put it, and what Will was doing in Hannibal's head was quite unclear at first glance. Ah, after all Hannibal was an admirer of beautiful things.

But back to the problem at hand, Hannibal was good at everything including cleaning his rather big house. Before long the place was spotless, not that there had been spots before, but now it was almost shining, including the surfaces that perhaps had no albedo to speak of.

Hannibal took out and counted all his containers; opened his fridge; made a trip to his pantry.

His stove and oven thoroughly occupied and the ingredients for a few stir fries chopped and waiting for their fiery fate, Hannibal looked at his watch. The day was still far from being over, lingering like a polite guest or a particularly clingy patient of his.

With determination, Hannibal dialed Will's number ignoring Alana's message and a message from an unknown number begging *Dr sexy pants* to come back and feed the hungry crowds. He was also referred to as the Jesus of Baltica. Jesus, however, wasn't that good with mental health; was abysmal with his parents, for a start.

Hannibal hadn't been raised religious but he had been taught to appreciate the imagery. During the war the remote castle Lecter was a refuge for several Jewish families and Hannibal's grandfather converted to Judaism afterwards. Hannibal only learned about it from Robertas who, being a staunch supporter of atheism, considered it one of the many peculiarities of the old man.

Once, very drunk, Robertas told Hannibal that his grandfather might have caught and eaten some Nazis wandering in the woods. The whole conversation was meant to comfort the practically mute boy and show him that revenge was always an option and a delicious one.

Will wasn't replying and thus Hannibal was left to ponder over his family history and uncanny connections his life built with it.

He could have retired, married Alana and lived a boring life in his family's home. They'd have a child or two. He would have been there when the intruders came - and he would have done the same thing. He'd have gone beastly, feral and glorious. He'd have protected what's his and eaten the chutzpah of his enemies with their flesh. And Mischa would have been scared of him and Alana would have found a reason to defend his actions, although she was far too principled… She had defended him because she hadn't been there. Would she have reacted differently, had she been hiding with their children and Mischa while Hannibal fought

for them - for himself, for the part of his soul that wanted to consume all inelegance in the world and stand over the planet like a black hole, just biding his time, just waiting for the creation to screw it up so badly that he'd have nothing else to do but to swallow it whole and reign over the abyss?

Will was calling back.

"Guess it's polite." Hannibal could hear him shrug.

"You're not very fond of eye contact, are you?" Hannibal asked. Otherwise he'd be talking about the black holes and he and Will weren't there yet.

"Wow, so observant. I don't like the eyes. Eyes don't like me either."

"You're very easy on the eye," Hannibal replied.

"I'm trying to be harder… That's not an innuendo! What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"How is Mischa?"

"She's asleep. Been asleep the whole time."

"What about a shower? Bathroom visits?"

"She didn't go anywhere. It stinks but I'm trying something."

"What is it you're trying?" Hannibal asked after a heavy pause during which he fought his angry tears over the thought of Mischa reduced to such indignity.

"I'm lying next to my bed, my hand outstretched. Sometimes she wakes up and looks at me. Then goes back to sleep. It's really mean of me to talk about her like that. As if she weren't in the room. But I'm looking at her."

"How long have you been there?"

"Five hours, I guess?"

"Doing what?"

"Lying with my hand offered and my back in pain and thinking about how I would order food from the aliens had they abducted me."

"And how would you do it?"

"By breaking up every ingredient into basic chemistry, duh."

"Brilliant."

"They wouldn't have been as good as you."

"Yes, your charges called me the Jesus of Baltica."

"You're too posh to be Jesus. Although, are you in any way interested in shaggy fishermen?"

"In the most inappropriate way, I can assure you."

"Forty days in the desert with you… Would you take me places?"

"I believe it's called dating."

"I think we're well past it. We're raising a child together."

"What can I say, Will? You knocked me up and made an honest man of me."

"I'm lying here on my shitty carpet, your sister is right there."

"Promise me you'll make her shower. For her."

"For her or for you? I don't have a keen sense of smell and I've seen enough dead bodies to know that however bad, the odour of the living is better. She's comfortable, Hannibal. She's comfortable and you'll have to live with that… She's awake. Hello, Mischa. I'm talking to your brother. Would you like me to stop?"

Hannibal stopped breathing. He heard shuffling and snorts of several dogs. "I stink," Mischa said weakly.

"We can fix that, if you want… I'll call you back. Or you call me, you creep."

Hannibal lowered the hand with his phone and realised he had burnt three out of six stews.

***

Mischa was staring at Will. Will was staring back.

"Am I… safe?"

"Yeah, you are. Hungry?"

She didn't reply.

"You'll feel better if you eat. I'll fetch you something… No, I'll ask someone to fetch us something."

Will called Jimmy, currently on kitchen duty, and a few minutes later Jimmy brought in a bowl of broth. Mushroom of course.

Will pushed the bowl towards Mischa. Winston sniffed it and licked it carefully. He whined, disappointed, and Jimmy muttered something about making some chicken soup maybe, but

then Mischa rolled onto her stomach, picked up the bowl and drank the broth in one go. She immediately began retching.

"I'm sorry I'll have to pull you out so you don't choke on it," Will warned and grabbed Mischa's hand.

Jimmy was there at the ready with a blanket, so Will immediately wrapped Mischa up in it, making sure to cover her head so that the light in the room wouldn't bother her.

She vomited on the carpet; Will was rubbing her back and Winston was licking her hands and face.

Abigail walked in with a glass of water, Ada behind her with some clean clothes and towels.

Mischa refused water.

"It's ok, she'll swallow some in the shower," Ada said softly. "Hey, pretty girl, want to have a wash and burn those fancy clothes of yours?"

Mischa nodded meekly.

"Ok, everybody out. Time for me to use Will's master bathroom!" Ada grinned at Will. "I'm gonna lift you up, sweetie. I'm a big strong woman and no one will hurt you ever as long as I'm breathing." Ada picked Mischa up and carried her to the bathroom.

***

Mischa was sitting in the bath, clutching the blanket and Winston to her.

"Ok, so I can cut your clothes off and then we can repair them, maybe, or I'm gonna show off my biceps and tear them up?.. Probably the wrong thing to say." Ada rolled her eyes at herself and cursed.

"You shouldn't curse," Mischa said automatically.

Ada turned on the water and Mischa wiggled her dirty toes in torn socks under the stream.

"How come you speak English? Oh, I know, I know, fancy rich family. Bet you spoke four languages before you were four."

"Five," Mischa replied.

"Five?"

"Five languages. Lithuanian, Russian, French, English and Latin so that Hannibal and I could exchange secret letters."

"He's a good one, your big brother, huh? Look, I've got pink scissors and some strange silver ones I found in your bag."

"Hannibal's. I want the pink ones."

Ada got to work. She cursed a lot and it never failed to make Mischa giggle. The soiled fabric Ada put into a laundry sack. She wasn't wearing gloves.

"He ate them," Mischa said suddenly. "I couldn't see, but he came to me and his mouth was bloody. He wasn't hurt, I knew he wasn't. Nothing hurts him. He's stronger than that. But he ate them and they're inside him now."

Winston whined and Mischa hugged him closer. Although Winston whined because Ada's scissors had caught his fur, he accepted Mischa's comfort even if it pushed him even more onto the scissors.

"Sweetie, first, there's nothing weak about being hurt. Your big brother was super hurt, I'm sure, and honestly, I think it's ok he ate them. Then he pooped them out. They were shit and he made sure they turned into shit. That's my second point. But if he scares you, you don't have to talk to him ever again." She shrugged casually.

"No, I want to. I love him. He came for me. I knew he would."

Ada showered Mischa and indeed Mischa swallowed some of the water.

"Which soap do you want? We have Will's ten in one soapy product and we have ten bottles of various shit your brother packed."

"I want the… various shit. I cursed." Mischa giggled.

"Say *fuck* , Mischa."

"Fuck," Mischa whispered.

"That's my girl. Fuck, why is it marked with the days of the week?" Ada glowered at the bottles, Venetian glass, handmade, tags of expensive paper marked with real fucking ink.

"I have weak hair. Too thin. Hannibal has a standing order with some perfumers in Paris. They make my shampoos, just for me and my hair."

"And you're worried he ate some bad people? I think I'm gonna ask him to order some for me."

Mischa giggled again. "He loves to impress. He bought me a private jet for my first birthday. Mom told him he was a…" She giggled again.

"Pompous idiot?"

"It sounds worse in Lithuanian."

"I bet it does…"

"I want to talk to him, I think. I haven't been talking to him much. Do you think he's angry?"

"Only at himself for being a pompous idiot."

"We could call him, right?"

"Sure. I could make you a really pretty soap crown and we'll call him."

"He always made me horns. No, it's not horns… Antlers. He made me antlers with soap. Then I'd hop out of the tub and pretend to gut him."

"You're a funny family, aren't you?"

"We are… we were very funny. Mom was sixty when I was born. A local priest wrote his best sermon about me."

"Of course he did. A fucking celibate abusive prick."

"I don't think I understand you. We've had him for dinner a few times. And we're Protestant. In name only."

"Had him for dinner? Well, I stand by what I said. You're all weirdos and he cooks so well!"

"He does! He'd make me a cake for my birthday every year, and it was exactly the same height and weight as I was!"

"Wow. You know, kid, my parents beat and hurt me and my sister. And we killed them. We didn't make it quick. Gill wanted to make it quick, but I wanted them to see. So they died watching lesbian porn and us eating a damn salad for the first time in our lives."

"Ugh, salad… Never lives up to expectations. Hannibal makes great salads though."

"Of course he does. Did you have to eat your weight and height in vegetables?"

"Sometimes. But it was delicious. And he cut vegetables into funny figures. And told me stories."

"How about we call him and demand a super duper salad all made of soap?"

Ada and Mischa giggled together. Winston seemed to have resigned to his soapy fate. At least it was warm.

Ada put her phone on the edge of the tub and dialed a contact named *Baltic Jesus* .

"Mischa!" Hannibal gasped.

"Hey," Mischa waved a soapy hand.

"Hey… Oh, darling, you're exquisite!"

"It's Ada," Mischa smiled at Ada and Ada inserted herself into the conversation.

"Hello, Baltic Jesus. Your sis here tells me all sorts of shit about you. Can you make us a salad that looks like a burger?"

"Sure. Anything. Anything you want. Mischa… Mischa, how are you? I'm so sorry I…"

"No!" Ada inserted herself again. "Talk good talk."

"Ehm… What would you like, darling?"

"Talk to me in Lithuanian," Mischa asked, then turned to Ada. "Sorry."

"Nah, it's ok. I'm gonna go and do something with your clothes then."

"No, don't go."

"Ada, please, throw them away… Mischa, I'll get you more. And feces are good to start a fire."

"Yeah, when they are dry," Ada commented.

"Is cashmere good to start a fire?" Mischa asked.

"I don't know but I'll find out. I'll burn all our sweaters. I'll get you new ones with Pinkie Pie," Hannibal promised. "I'll wear one myself," he added. And then he spoke in Lithuanian.

To Ada, it seemed a bit weird that even though she couldn't understand a single word, she could hear that the siblings exchanged the sappiest endearments and in general talked rubbish.

Winston looked at Ada.

"I'm gonna dry Winston, ok?" Ada asked.

Mischa nodded absently. Winston sighed. Really, what could he do, when compared to a fine aging cannibal like Mischa's brother?

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> A short update. My life has been so much shit recently so writing has been hard. But I love this story. So... Here's a short update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Act 1: limbo

Hannibal had to buy more containers. Actually he had to buy so many containers, the shop assistant who helped him (since he bought his containers in a shop where assistance was necessary in order to dazzle the buyer with the buyer's importance by telling them every little thing about every little thing; in short it was like a jewelry store, but with containers) asked him whether he was trying - something. She wasn't sure what her theory was. No man needed that many containers.

At Hannibal's polite glare, she coughed with equal politeness, then beamed. "You're married, aren't you? Or courting someone, right? Want to cook for them and impress them?"

Hannibal was impressed himself. The real explanation, however, wasn't for anyone outside of Hannibal's head or Wolf Trap. He hoped Alana didn't shop here!

So, with containers purchased, filled with various reheatables for about a month of teenage hunger, and loaded into Hannibal's car, Hannibal started his drive towards Wolf Trap. He'd just been there the day before and he'd just talked with Will the day before, but Hannibal Lecter would never let anyone live without his cooking. They called him Jesus and he had to live up to their expectations.

It wouldn't hurt if Will smiled at him either. No, it wouldn't hurt at all. The drive wasn't that long. Hannibal spent it thinking how he would reorganise Uffizi and where he would buy more Botticelli from, so that all Botticelli would end up in Florence. He allowed himself to think how he'd intimidate every other museum into selling him all their Botticelli. He arrived in Wolf Trap in an excellent mood which didn't last.

"Where's Will?" Hannibal asked after his containers were transferred to the kitchen with hymns and praises. "And Mischa?"

"Mischa is under Will's bed," Abigail replied easily. "And Will is standing in the nearby stream, staring into the middle distance, head back and eyes closed, or as he calls it, fishing."

Hannibal considered ignoring everyone but it would be rude, so he endured, although the mood and the good feeling was gone.

He went to Will's bedroom - only to find Ada there, sitting by the bed and reading. "Hello," she looked up. "Mischa is asleep. Winston chose to follow Will, and I'm the next best thing."

Hannibal was used to be the most authoritative figure in the room. He didn't need to raise his voice, to move. He just… glared, and he glared politely. His whole demeanour suggested that it was extremely rude to argue with him.

Yet, with Ada something else was at stake. Hannibal had never feared anything for no one would dare to threaten him, privileged and menacing as he was. Ada had no fear from early on. Nothing could stand against Ada now. Hannibal respected and admired that.

"Permission to… approach the bench?" Hannibal smiled charmingly.

"If she tells you to fuck off, you're…"

"I'm fucking off," Hannibal promised. Ada smiled at him brightly. Then she remained seated and turned a page in her book.

"If I am to approach my sister, I'll need some space."

"Nope," Ada turned another page. "Ugh, did you know that romance novels go on forever before two people fucking talk?"

"I had my suspicions."

"That's too bad…"

"Indeed." Hannibal knelt by the bed and looked underneath.

Mischa was asleep, wrapped up in the blanket Hannibal had packed her.

"What is she wearing?" Hannibal asked.

"My t-shirt. It says progress isn't linear. Will gives us those shirts when we arrive. Mischa said it was softer than hers."

Hannibal sighed and lay down by the bed, in all his three piece glory, bespoke and expensive and pretty. He extended his hand towards Mischa's sleeping form. He called to her in Lithuanian.

She woke up slowly, stiff and uncomfortable, or so it appeared to Hannibal. He remained where he was, as Mischa turned around and blinked at him. Her pale blond hair was matted and dirty once again, her nails bitten and uncut.

Hannibal realised he hadn't paid much attention to her nails - he, who always paid attention to every little thing.

"Sweetheart, hello," he greeted her.

Mischa didn't reply.

"I missed you. Is it ok if I stay with you for a bit?"

He noticed her eyes shift to Ada and then she looked back at Hannibal.

"I was so happy you talked to me yesterday. It was very kind of you. I know…" Hannibal sighed. "I know you *saw* me. I know it scared you. I'm sorry. I'd do it all again, I'm afraid, because I want to hurt those who hurt you. No one gets to hurt you. No one." He swallowed the rising bile in his throat. "But I'm sorry if I'm scaring you. I love you, I'll love you no matter what." Hannibal closed his eyes for a moment.

"I cooked for everyone here, you know? I brought a lot of boxes full of food, and…"

"Food? Mischa, may I leave and eat?" Ada looked under the bed. "Your bro cooks like a pro. Look, I'm getting all poetic for him. I'll bring you something, hm?"

Mischa shook her head minutely.

"Ok," Ada replied softly and returned to her book.

"I cooked some of your favourite meals too. I marked them as your favourite and made more of those. All you like."

Mischa carefully touched Hannibal's hand.

"Does Will snore?" Hannibal asked conspiratorially.

Mischa giggled.

"I take it he does. Do I snore?"

Mischa giggled even louder and covered her mouth with a hand.

"Let me tell you, young lady, you snore too… If you want, I'll take you to a doctor. But I think your snores are great."

Mischa slid closer to Hannibal.

"Mama snored. And papa," she whispered.

Then she wailed.

Hannibal warned her he'd hold her, and he did. He couldn't fit under Will's stupid bed, but he tried his best. His tie was getting in the way of Mischa's frantic hands so he tossed it aside.

Crying turned into biting and hitting. Hannibal kept holding her - carefully, making sure she could move away if she wanted or cuddle closer, even as she kept hitting her brother with her small fists. At some point she must have soiled herself because suddenly the air became putrid.

Mischa stopped for a moment, scared.

"It's ok, darling girl, it's fine. I don't care, I don't… I'll help you shower, if you want."

"Or I will," Ada promised threateningly.

"I want my blankie back," Mischa whispered.

"Ok, no problem. No rush. I'll have it cleaned. I'll wash it myself in the cold river, and I'll give the river the skin of my hands to wash away with all your pain…"

"Wow, you're a real cheerer, aren't you?" Ada asked.

Quite against her or Hannibal's expectations, Mischa began murmuring softly in Lithuanian. Hannibal answered with equal softness. Ada pretended to be fully engaged in her book.

***

Mischa allowed Hannibal to carry her to the bathroom, then she sent him *and* Ada away and refused to address or acknowledge either of them. Ada shrugged and told Hannibal to walk down to the kitchen. Well, she told him to fuck off.

Having descended to the kitchen, Hannibal was met with the sight of Will pushing someone against the wall aggressively, while Abigail glared daggers at the someone.

"Will… Will, while I totally agree with your emotion, your response," Jimmy began.

"His response is fine!" Beverly argued.

"I just…"

"You're Brian, aren't you?" Will asked. "I was happier not noticing you."

"Will," Hannibal called calmly.

"Hannibal," Will whispered, momentarily letting go of assumedly Brian. He immediately remembered himself however and pushed Brian back into the wall.

"What's going on?" Hannibal asked, walking closer to Will.

"Yes, Brian, why don't you tell Dr Lecter what's going on?"

"Brian told Abigail that her desire to get a glittering manicure and dance in a charity competition is *pedestrian* ." Jimmy winced.

"Oh," Hannibal said and turned to Abigail. "What are you dancing?"

"Ballroom. Ada and I have been rehearsing forever. And I want my glittering manicure." Abigail shrugged. She certainly wasn't the offended party.

"Just…" Brian whimpered. "She's the daughter of the Minnesota Shrike, and…"

"And she can't wear glitter?" Hannibal asked.

"I made a poor choice of words!" Brian yelled.

"Ok. Ok. You regret it. You're honest." Will stepped back and helped Brian adjust his clothes.

"Sorry, Abigail. I really didn't mean it like that. Sorry." Brian moved a bit farther from Will.

"How about I bring my manicurist here? Tomorrow. I'll tell her to bring as much glitter as she has. Do you have the costumes, Abigail?" Hannibal asked.

"We do. But if you can find something better…" She grinned. "We're the first and only lesbian couple there. They tried to disqualify us."

"I take it Dr Bloom helped?"

"I did," Will grunted. "I scared them. I hope. Then Alana had to protect us all… Fuck it!" Will rubbed his face.

"I hope to do better," Hannibal promised, and he rushed outside. He had some shopping to do and Hannibal loved shopping. He hoped that Ada would explain to Mischa that he had gone on a quest…

***

"And then what?" Mischa asked in disbelief from under the bed.

"I want to sleep!" Will begged from the bed.

"Shut it, it's more important. You shouldn't have gone fishing so early anyway." Ada beamed back at Mischa. "So, then your brother bought us all tickets to that charity gala that Abigail and I will dance at. He made his tailor call me and we're having a fitting tomorrow. Afterwards we're having mani pedi at your house. Am I too easy to bribe?" Ada asked.

Mischa didn't reply. She burrowed under her blankie, clean and smelling of lavender. Winston appeared to enjoy the smell too.

"What else did he do?" Mischa asked after a few moments.

"Well, he asked Will to be his plus one…"

Despite the fact that it was the second time Will had heard said news, he still fell off his bed.

"You can come here, if you want," Mischa offered generously.

"No, thank you. I think I'll go and… fix a motor or something."

"Touchy, huh?" Ada asked the door behind which Will disappeared.

"Hey, it's my brother. He's not easy to impress."

"Oh come on! Will is - attractive. I'm a lesbian, I know what I'm talking about. And he can catch your brother a killer trout. I bet your brother loves a challenge! So imagine, Will catches him the skinniest, boniest trout ever! And your brother turns it into - super soup!"

"Bouillabaisse!" Mischa offered.

"Bless you. What is it?"

"Fish stew!"

"Yeah, that."

"And then what?" Mischa demanded.

"Maybe I should read you a regular fairy tale," Ada suggested.

"No… no, someone's always getting eaten there."

"Oh… oh shit. Ehm… I can ask the other kids? I mean… we're all older than you are… But I'm sure Debbie had that book about a trans unicorn. Let me fetch it for you!"

"No, stay and tell me about my brother!" Mischa insisted.

"Ok, ok, so Hannibal fell in love with a shaggy fisherman. They made soup and maybe danced. Does your brother dance?"

"Of course he does! He's beautiful when he dances! He taught me some 18th century dances!" Mischa sounded very proud.

"Sounds about right!" Ada scratched her head.

Mischa stopped talking.

"Hey, I didn't mean to…"

"Do you think I could have a glittering manicure too?" Mischa wondered.

"I think your brother will make it pure gold. Hey, do you want to watch some dumb videos? We could look for some videos of golden manicure!"

Mischa nodded enthusiastically, so Ada crawled under Will's bed as well and they watched some cute, calming videos of golden manicure and gold in general being melted and moulded into all sorts of shapes, which inevitably led to the first scenes of *Lord of the Rings* .

"Hannibal read it to me when I was six," Mischa said, yawning. "Mama didn't like it. Thought it was… all nonsense. But Hannibal sneaked into my room at night and read it to me."

"He's a mischievous adult," Ada mused.

"No. He just… he loves me." Mischa yawned again.

"Maybe he should read to you again?" Ada whispered.

"I'd love that… he'd translate me books on the go… I love him." Mischa was asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Catch my Good omens reference and the trans unicorn book is called Kelp. Maybe it's not trans unicorn but I'm trans, so it is for me.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Ehm... Love conquers all, I guess? And all that shit.

"And who will I stay with?" Mischa asked from under Will's bed first thing in the morning.

"What?" Will asked, confused.

"If you go with my brother and Ada goes with Abigail, and…" Mischa went silent.

"Hey!" Will rolled off his bed and landed so that he could see Mischa holding on to Winston. "First, Winston won't go anywhere. And second… Why should I go? I don't want to go!"

"Hannibal invited you! You want to disappoint him?" Mischa glared at Will like her brother.

"Disappoint? No! I mean, I don't care if I do. Or don't. I'm not a sociable person!" Will explained, clearly. "But I think you should meet Peter. I think it'll do both of you a world of good!" Will couldn't remember the last time he used so many exclamation marks in his discourse.

Will and Mischa ate some delicious breakfast food under Will's bed. Winston and his kitten friend joined in, of course.

"How come Hannibal allows you to eat… all this?" Will gestured wildly at the spread in front of them - all fried and greasy and happy food, as far as Will was concerned.

"Oh, he tried to introduce us to American breakfast food. Mama and papa didn't like it, and neither did Hannibal, but I think it's delicious. It makes me *want* to eat vegetables for the rest of the day."

"I didn't think about it like that," Will admitted. "I hate vegetables. They're all raw and wet." He winced.

"They're crunchy and delicious!" Mischa argued.

Will decided not to tell her that it seemed like cannibalism to him, to eat things all raw and crunchy. Not delicious, very much not. He wasn't that hopeless, after all. He wasn't.

After breakfast Mischa wanted to take a shower and shave her head bald. Will agreed to it because he hoped that it would make Hannibal reconsider his invitation. He felt free and liberated afterwards and more importantly, so did Mischa. Will took her to Peter and left them to it once it was established that Mischa wanted to know every animal, their story, their

tale of woe and suchlike. When he was sneaking away, Mischa was getting to know Cannibal the ferret and sounded very excited about it, all things considered. He hoped Mischa would sleep somewhere else that night, but alas, Mischa made a comeback.

She spent most of the night complaining to Will about how his bedroom wasn't half as cozy as Peter's, ehm, quarters, all smelly and full of animal hair. Will thought his room was just as animal friendly.

He allowed himself to curse and whine but ended up on the floor holding Mischa's hand.

***

One mani pedi turned into a weekly tradition. After all, the gala was a few months away. Mischa now wore liquid gold manicure which she used to pet various animals in Peter's care.

And Hannibal, the traitor, he was so happy to see Mischa in charge of her appearance that he brought in a barber to teach his sister about all the ways to take care of one's bald head. Mischa listened to it all very attentively. The traitor.

To make matters worse, Hannibal immediately became brilliant at doing manicures, discovering various maladies as he went and thus becoming dangerously close to putting his good manicurist out of job, but really, could he trust anyone with Mischa's liquid gold manicure? No, he couldn't. So he took it upon himself with his usual three piece grace. And if Ada abused her power and asked for more manicures, then no one needed to know it.

Hannibal even offered Will to do his nails, so Will had no other choice but to cut his nails barbarically in the kitchen. Hannibal cried stoically, everyone glared at Will, and Beverly demanded her own golden manicure. She asked Hannibal to make it solid and appropriate for her wood cutting passion. Hannibal just smiled politely. And delivered, of course, because he was a bastard and had to be arrested on the grounds of being gorgeous. Will even called Jack Crawford to check whether it was solid enough ground for a detention. Jack said no and Will told him to go and fuck himself. Will called Alana and somehow Alana agreed with Jack, that is until she learned who she was agreeing with. Then she disagreed but meekly. Will couldn't rely on anyone! He went fishing with vengeance. Vengeance was by all means a great fishing companion. It was all quiet and seething.

But somehow Will still ended up with perfect nails and a bespoke suit.

"What is this sorcery?" He asked Mischa who peeked curiously from under his bed when Will tried the suit on.

"Oh, my brother is what I believe you'd call a creep? He takes one look at you and he knows your measurements. It looks good on you! I'll have so much fun with Peter!"

"Mischa, please, do me a favour and have a panic attack now," Will begged.

"Nah, it won't be fun."

"It's not about fun! I'll have to be sociable!"

"You'll have to make do!"

Mischa ended up having a panic attack in the middle of the night, but once she almost took Will's eyes out, she ran to Peter and made her disrespect towards Will known enough that Will had to put the damn suit on and follow Abigail and Ada into Hannibal's Bentley.

They had their costumes and their manicure, after all, and Will didn't want to shit on their parade. He spent the drive being taciturn and angry and the recipient of Hannibal's lovesick glances. It was wonderful and terrible and everything Will could have ever wanted, and that was why he hated it all more than he could.

***

The whole charity gala thing was in honour of people like Will - those who helped children in need. Most of *people like Will* were aggressively religious or terribly antivax. Therefore most of people attending the gala were those who believed that anyone in need was in fact in need of Jesus, no matter their cultural background or how far Jesus had led those kids into trouble so far, much to Jesus' horror.

Hannibal of course felt at home among those, since he felt at home anywhere as long as he could charm someone into oblivion.

Alana felt at home because she loved those gatherings where she could lead a few crusades at once and conquer the metaphorical Jerusalem and Constantinople a few times during one evening.

And Will just wanted to get back home without spilling a few drinks all over his bespoke suit which fit him too well and didn't even have the good manners to make him itch or something.

For all his talk about being polite, Hannibal proved to be terribly rude when he showed up and offered his services in adjusting Will's tie.

And Hannibal didn't need to know it, but before he arrived, Beverly and Jimmy and even Brian had to hunt Will down and guilt trip/seduce him into taking a long shower, using some fancy products, that is Jimmy's shampoo and Beverly's conditioner and Brian's hair gel; into shaving his face; into a clean shirt and that damn suit that complimented Will's eyes.

"It compliments your autism too," Jimmy insisted as he rubbed shampoo into Will's hair and maybe eyes.

"How so?" Will wailed.

"It's soft and comfortable," Beverly cooed from the doorway, fondling Will's suit lasciviously.

"Bev, stop fondling Will's suit lasciviously!" Jimmy demanded.

"But it's so soft," she argued. Ada walked in and shooed everyone away at that point, and Will was almost grateful - but then she took over and continued to try and make a shaggy fisherman into an apostle of Hannibal Lecter, and wasn't that humiliating?

***

"They won't be ready to give any money once they see me!" Will kept trying to convince Hannibal who remained clinging to Will's arm like a lovesick psychiatrist. "I'm… I'm a mess!"

"And it's lovely," Hannibal assured but made haste to procure Will a glass of whiskey.

"And now I'm gonna be drunk and make inappropriate comments about patriarchy and heteronormativity!" Will continued arguing. He was as insufferable as he knew how to be and Hannibal still looked at him with yearning eyes and kept his arm around Will's waist and gushed about Will to anyone who would listen, not that anyone would miss an opportunity to listen to Dr Lecter.

It was mostly civil, Will had to acknowledge. And Abigail and Ada easily won the competition, but alas, by that point quite a few arseholes had had quite a few drinks, so Will suddenly found himself listening to *opinions* .

He didn't want to be able to repeat those opinions to Abigail, Ada, Mischa or any inhabitant of his home.

"Well, I have a girlfriend too!" Dr Bloom announced. Her girlfriend had left some time earlier.

"But you're not a troubled teen!"

Alana swallowed some wine or maybe brandy.

"You're such arseholes," she sighed.

"You're all deplorable," Hannibal translated. "And have you met my lovely Will?"

Lovely Will was quite drunk and once again disappointed in humanity, but he was at Hannibal's arm and he wore a soft suit.

"Deplorable?!"

"Absolutely!" Will slurred. "You're all here to make yourselves feel better. You don't know what it's like to be different…"

Someone made a comment about Hannibal's sister.

Hannibal stiffened.

"You're all shitheads!" Ada yelled, then continued more calmly. "You're all scared of all things difficult, different, other. I can't blame you. Sartre too thought that hell was other people but he'd vomit all over you!"

With that Ada dragged Abigail away to make out in Hannibal's car.

"What's Sartre?" Someone asked.

"Will, I'm going to need your bad whiskey, badly!" Hannibal announced and everyone followed him on the hunt for bad whiskey.

The music was still playing and the evening was ruined anyway, or so Will thought. That was why he asked Hannibal to dance with him. Why would Hannibal agree to dance with him after all?

Hannibal, the bastard, agreed to dance with him.

***

"Do you want to know what mess your brother and Will made of each other?" Ada asked, sticking her head into the stables late at night.

Peter hissed at her and pointed at Mischa sleeping under his bed, with Cannibal the ferret cuddled close to her chest.

"She might still want to know!" Ada hissed back.

"No, she might not! She's asleep! You all go and be all… people pleasers. And we here, we live good, wholesome lives!" Peter argued proudly.

"Good for you, man, but her bro made a right mess of himself. He dipped Will!" Ada announced in a loud whisper.

"No way!" Peter walked closer to Ada. "Tell me more!"

"Well, Will was all, hey, can't dance, just have that hot arse. And Hannibal was all, hey, I'm so fancy my shit is designed specifically for that occasion. And then Hannibal dipped him! They looked ridiculous. Some people around had their sexual awakening. Some people wept because they hoped to marry Dr Lecter. Dr Bloom cheered like a drunken monkey, which she

frankly was. Oh, and Abigail and I won the competition. I'm not sure we raised much money, but our tango was immaculate. Hannibal said so in Spanish and I used Google Translate to make sure he said what I thought he had said."

"Amazing! Want to pet a squirrel? I rescued one. Mischa found her, but I helped."

"Oh, fuck, I'd love to pet a squirrel! I never knew it's possible!"

Peter took Ada to the rescued squirrel that didn't seem too grateful about having been rescued.

"She's injured," Peter explained. "Mischa administered her first dose of antibiotics, and I think in a few days she'll be ok. I called her ISS."

"That's awesome!" Ada exclaimed hissingly. "ISSSSSSSS."

"No, ISS."

"International space squirrel," Ada cooed.

"I didn't think about it like that and I love it."

They petted the angry but stoned squirrel for a while.

"And where's Will?" Peter whispered.

"Snogging Hannibal. Or rather wishing he had snogged Hannibal. Hannibal is in the kitchen making brownies from scratch. Wanna come and taste?"

"No, I won't leave Mischa."

"Yeah, he'd love that… Expect him in an hour with a brownie just for you."

***

An hour later Hannibal, quiet and deadly and shoeless, walked into the stables and left a batch of brownies and a jug of milk for Peter and Mischa. He crawled under Peter's bed to swear to Mischa that they will all be happy real soon. And he crawled back and made his way to Will's bedroom where Will was wrestling with his bowtie.

Hannibal looked at Will all smouldering. Will looked at Hannibal all - glaring.

Well, love was work, all love was work. Hannibal wasn't afraid of work.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Short update. Again. Sorry.

Act 1: gates of Heaven

How dared he, that is Hannibal, stand there all smoulder and swagger and paisley and tartan and what not, looking at Will with such heat Will could fry an egg in the depths of those amber eyes? Will was not a poetic person, frying an egg in the depths of Hannibal's eyes was the height of his poetic capabilities and simultaneously the rock bottom of poetry as an art. He was vaguely aware of it but too furious to acknowledge it. Besides, he didn't want an egg at that hour.

"You, you think you what, you dip me like a chicken finger into ketchup and I'll melt like butter?"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "Are you hungry, Will?'

"No, I'm not! You, you think you…"

"Mischa is sleeping somewhere else tonight," Hannibal purred.

"She is. You're a creep, and I won't just surrender, I won't!" Will promised, taking a few steps towards Hannibal. "I'm not that easy," he said and grabbed fistfuls of Hannibal's shirt. "I won't just… fall at your feet!" Will pushed Hannibal against the door.

"The position is full of potential, however," Hannibal argued softly. He raised his hands to cup Will's face.

"And stop looking at me all dreamy, like you want to eat me! Stop! It's not working!" Will leaned in, closing the remaining distance between them. "I don't even like you," he whispered into Hannibal's lips.

Before he could come up with another ghastly food metaphor, Will was suddenly pushed into the door by Hannibal and snogged - breathless.

"I'm not that easy," Will continued to argue when Hannibal's curious exploratory mouth abandoned his lips for the underside of Will's jaw and his neck. "I like rubbish food. I cut my nails with pliers…"

"Please, darling, I'm not into torture," Hannibal begged, which was good because Will wouldn't beg Hannibal to get his clever fucking mouth where it belonged, that is under Will's left ear.

"I have issues…"

"Oh no, Will, you're the first edition of the most forbidden novel."

"We barely know each other…"

"I'm trying to right this wrong," Hannibal explained, as he moved to unbutton Will's Henley.

"And you can't just come every day and feed my kids and dogs and other animals and… and… Oh, fuck, yes!"

Somehow Hannibal managed to rob Will of his shirt and unbutton his own, so now Will was all warm and fuzzy, being pressed chest to chest to Hannibal's totally wicked warmth.

"I have no chest hair," Will kept on.

"Fine by me." A nipple got caught into Hannibal's teeth. Oh, well, maybe Will was into torture because it was… torturous. In a good, albeit wicked way.

"And I hate psychiatrists…"

"Not your psychiatrist," Hannibal argued and moved to lavish his attention over the other nipple.

"I have abandonment issues. And daddy issues. And…"

"Not your psychiatrist," Hannibal repeated and kissed Will's lips once again.

It was all fine and sexy, but suddenly both men got pushed away by the door tossed open, and Mischa rushed inside and slid under Will's bed.

"Oh no, you're naked!" Peter covered his eyes in horror.

From under the bed they could hear Mischa's sobbing.

Hannibal forgot all about Will's abandonment issues - and frankly, so did Will - and both men lay by the bed, clumsy and awkward and spotting a tent in their respective respectable trousers.

Will went as far as to crawl under the bed and hold Mischa's hand and caress her head.

Hannibal remained helpless, heartbroken, hopeless, horny and perhaps some other words starting with an *h* , by the bed.

"It's ok, you're safe," Will was murmuring endlessly. He glared at Hannibal but Hannibal was already fully dressed and murmuring something too, albeit in Lithuanian and thus

incomprehensible to Will. It seemed to comfort Mischa, though. She moved closer to the edge of the bed until she could nuzzle Hannibal's fancy knee.

"Love is for children," Hannibal suddenly said, loud and clear, looking up at Will. "Love is for children," he repeated, as if pleading.

"And horny and/or cuddly is for adults," Will whispered back with a giggle.

At some point they ended up on the floor, all three of them, by the bed. Hannibal pulled down the duvet from Will's bed and winced at the smell.

"Oh, and I don't do my laundry often enough," Will said triumphantly.

"And still I can't take my eyes off of you," Hannibal replied. Despite his cheekbones, he sounded and looked awfully soft.

***

"Tell me you got some action!" Beverly demanded first thing in the morning. If not for his skill in dealing with people, Will would have remained entirely non-verbal before his coffee…

That was when he noticed that he now owned a wicked coffee machine that could also make hot chocolate and fly anyone to the moon. Jimmy immediately assured him that the kids were drinking the chocolate option.

Will tried wrestling with the machine for some espresso. The machine smirked at him and showed amazing resilience to all the laws of robotechnics.

"He didn't get any action," Beverly concluded and pushed the right buttons.

After a few sips Will quipped at her. "If you can call a panic attack *some action* , then yes, I got a lot of it, and I won't have it any other way."

Beverly was so touched she bit off her golden gelled nail. It was bitter and disgusting.

***

Hannibal, unperturbed and perfect as he was, still came to Wolf Trap every day. The only difference was that now he greeted Will with a kiss and maybe a dip, if he thought no one was watching, although in the house full of teenagers someone was always watching, if only for the teenagers.

If Mischa was busy with Peter and his animals or with Jimmy and algebra or with Will and tools, then Will would sneak out, even if he was the one providing the busy part, and make out with Hannibal. He found it both bittersweet and hilarious.

A few times Hannibal's sneaky former surgeon hands made it all the way into Will's pants. Will himself never made it to Hannibal's pants, what with being reduced to a pile of infatuated goo in Hannibal's hands.

And so it went until the day Ada and Abigail took Mischa with them for some star gazing late at night. Winston accompanied them. Gill carried a gun, although she shouldn't have, but Will wasn't very concerned about should and shouldn'ts. Not when it came to his kids…

Now when it came to himself, he was less certain. It was a shame, to be so uncertain, even as he was writhing under Hannibal and suddenly in his soft sheets. Now, his sheets had always been soft, but not like that, not like silk… And now it was definitely silk.

"Hannibal, you creep… Did you switch my sheets?"

"I did, you clever boy. I wanted to see you like that, on good bed linen."

"You… fucking… Ah… Alright, whatever, Hannibal."

"I knew you'd come around."

"You're manipulative and I hate you."

"No, you don't." Hannibal did the unmentionable - he took off his pants and underwear. Will was done for.

Hannibal was - beautiful. He wasn't just handsome, just masculine. He was smart and somehow it showed everywhere - it was in the way he moved, looked, spoke, and even gasped. He gasped so prettily, and Will swore to himself that once he was able to think and plan, he'd make Hannibal gasp more.

"Could you… It's too much… Hannibal!"

Hannibal sat up. "What is it?" He asked.

"I… I want you to lie down with your back to me. I'm sorry. I can't… I don't want to explain it now. Could you just… do it?"

Hannibal nodded and lay down next to Will, his back to Will's chest.

Will let out a long sigh and spooned Hannibal. "There you are. Beautiful…" He kissed across Hannibal's back, cupping his shoulders tenderly. "It's easier, talking to you like that. Tending to you like that." He slid his hands around Hannibal's torso, bit his nape and nuzzled his hair. "It's easier, when I don't have to avoid your eyes. Is it alright for you?"

"It's beautiful," Hannibal breathed out. He covered Will's hands with his own and leaned greedily into Will's touch, his lips.

"You are," Will agreed, entirely missing Hannibal's point. "Here… and here… and here." Will's hand slid down Hannibal's body, landing into a soft bend of his leg where it connected to his torso. "What an angle… I can't help thinking of angles when I'm in bed. Is that ok?"

"It's lovely," Hannibal replied. He turned his head and kissed Will's temple before moving his face away from Will's. Will noticed Hannibal's eyes remained firmly shut.

"I like it here." Will's fingers dug into the muscle of Hannibal's hip and thigh. "I like it that there are places where you're soft. I won't defeat you with this knowledge," Will promised.

Hannibal dropped his head back, onto Will's shoulder.

"Will you be alright if nothing else happens tonight?" Will asked.

"It's a silly question, Will. And here I was, thinking there could be no silly questions and that you are a clever boy… My clever boy…"

Will bit Hannibal's shoulder, cuddled closer. It was all warmth, smells, getting to know each other. No one talked about their innermost thoughts during the first meeting. Why should touch be any different? Tonight was about the touch that was like small talk and clever flirting; like talking about a shared love for a book. None was eager to mention their nightmares and dark underbellies. None was eager to impress either. The impressions had been made. There was still much to be talked about, to be discovered, mutually.

"Thank you." Will kissed Hannibal's ear.

Hannibal brought their joined hands to his lips and bit Will's forefinger. Will hissed in reply. His body followed every curve and crook of Hannibal's. They both were sometimes too bony and sometimes too soft; sometimes too sensitive and sometimes not sensitive enough; sometimes wicked and sometimes naive.

Will's stubble scratched Hannibal's skin. Hannibal's stubble rubbed against the knuckles of Will's hands.

Will mistook their shared shivers for cold and pulled a blanket around them.

"The worst part… is I could fall asleep like that," Will confessed.

"I think it's the best part," Hannibal argued. "It's the very best part."

"I don't know what you have been up to but how dare you have stayed away from me all this time?" Will held on to Hannibal and stopped moving, at least consciously.

"I assume I was lost. I'm sorry, darling, I must have looked in the wrong places… But you must have looked in the wrong places too."

"I was right here," Will insisted.

"And I was right there. Neither of us managed to make it to the right place on time."

"Not letting you go," Will threatened.

"Not going anywhere."

***

Mischa had a wonderful night. She watched the stars and listened to frogs and saw a deer. She slept under the open sky, safe and secure with Winston, Ada, Abigail and Gill. And a few more people. The night was cool, her sleep was calm.

In the morning, once they returned home, Mischa, still half asleep, settled under Will's bed, oblivious to her brother holding Will and keeping him safe and secure right above her head.

"I think we're not alone anymore," Hannibal informed Will's hair.

"Philosophically or right now?" Will asked.

"I say, both. But according to the smell, Mischa is here."

Will was about to roll over and panic but Hannibal held him tight.

"Don't panic. I dressed you at night and got dressed myself."

"Hannibal, you're a… creep. And a treasure."

"I know." Hannibal was very proud of himself. "Better safe than sorry, after all."

Will grumbled something but fell back asleep. A few hours later Mischa ended up joining them, making a place for herself between Hannibal and Will and settling there with a happy sigh.

Will opened one eye, decided he was dreaming and returned to his interrupted fantasies of taking Hannibal ice fishing.

Hannibal, in the meantime, dreamed of taking Will to the opera.

And Mischa, she slept without either dreams or nightmares. She was resting and all was well.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

TW for descriptions of abuse.

Act 2: beginning

Mischa said she wanted to go to the opera. She said so just as her brother was on his way to have some tender shower morning sex.

"And now we have to explain to a ten-year-old with severe PTSD why we're having shower together," Will moaned into Hannibal's shoulder.

Being a man of stubborn will (ha-ha, not funny, no pun intended, or is it?) Hannibal willed his erection away and glared/longingly stared at Will's own erection… No, there was a ten-year-old girl to take care of. No erections.

"She's very environmentally aware, so we can always say we tried to save water. Or a turtle. Both. It rhymes," Hannibal replied. He exited the bathroom, thus letting Will take a cold shower, and unsurprisingly, Mischa didn't ask a single embarrassing question.

A conventional psychiatrist in Hannibal died a painful death that morning. He should have told Mischa it was unwise, he should have told her it wasn't the right time. But Mischa's brother and an unconventional human being in general, Hannibal nodded and grinned and made an appointment with his tailor. If Mischa wanted to go to the opera, she would. Hannibal accepted no reasoning, not that anyone dared offer him some…

Well, Alana did. But Hannibal successfully glared at her.

Everyone else was just excited.

The morning of the tailor's appointment, everyone suddenly remembered that Jimmy had built a proper, albeit small, bathhouse just for himself, but he was a generous man, so he welcomed Winston and Mischa there. Both had to be bribed and corralled into the tiny building. Ada brandished all ten hair products in her hands while Will balanced about twenty dog products in his.

But Misha had used to be a lovingly spoiled girl and she welcomed back all the care she could get, while Winston had used to be just a stray, so he glared at everyone like Hannibal and judged every human in his vicinity dead. Even Mischa. He warmed up a bit when Hannibal offered him some homemade sausage laced with sedatives and maybe some half legal drugs. Winston ended up high and grumpy. When Will wasn't looking, Hannibal offered Winston more trippy sausage, so by the time they arrived at the shop, Winston was high and indifferent. Hannibal gave up on trying to trick Will and openly gave Winston more drugs. Now Winston was high and totally fine with everything, probably because he was half asleep and dreaming of a monochrome dog heaven which involved him, Mischa and those big humans hunting with him in the woods only to stop and coo at a tiny bunny that big humans wanted to eat and Mischa wanted to pet. Winston just wanted to throw up, to be honest.

As an apology, Hannibal quietly informed Will which person he had to bribe to get all the paperwork for Winston being recognised as a service dog sorted in no time at all. He also ordered Winston a jacket. Who could have known that Winston was a fashionista deep in his heart? Winston could! But he was too high.

"If he howls all the way through the opera…" Will began, while being measured himself.

"I'd consider it a good addition to Handel," Hannibal agreed, placatingly.

"The critics and the society," Will began with so much disdain that the tailor's assistant thought him rude and stuck a needle somewhere it didn't belong.

"They think what I tell them to think," Hannibal said. It was true and it drove Will mad.

"Yeah, well, I'm autistic and I've had a hell of a life and fuck me, I don't trust people!"

"I'd love to make love to you too, darling," Hannibal confessed dreamily. The assistant blushed and pulled the needle out of Will.

"There are kids and pets here," Mischa reminded, but she didn't seem to mind.

Mischa wanted a bell skirt made of black silk and some French lace; a black blouse with a lot of Italian lace; and a tux.

The tailor tried to argue. The tailor got glared at, snarled at and not at all menacingly barked at.

"It's just peculiar," he tried to defend himself. "And the lady is bald!"

"The lady is bold indeed," Will seethed. "Hannibal, I say, Mischa needs some wicked jewelry."

"Oh, I thought you'd never ask!"

They went to a few jewelry stores where Will felt like a stranger (while Winston remained high), but he enjoyed seeing Mischa all happy and grabby-hands, to the dismay of the sales people and Hannibal's delight.

Mischa picked herself a set of emerald and gold earrings, therefore their next step had to be a tattoo and piercing parlor where Hannibal put his foot down about a tattoo but agreed to any number of piercings. Mischa ended up with the traditional two. Winston ended up petted a lot.

Afterwards they got Mischa some shoes for the opera and went back to Hannibal's home for a meal.

Will complained about being exhausted, Mischa was too excited, as was Hannibal. Will left them to cooking and being happy for some time while he took a nap in Hannibal's living room out of the sheer class hate for Hannibal's expensive furniture.

By the time the food was ready, both Hannibal and Will were exchanging concerned looks, expecting Mischa to break down, however, being the perfect aristocrat, Mischa didn't break down until they were back in Wolf Trap where Mischa cried and laughed and talked about her parents a lot, much to the concerned happiness of everyone present.

She was too excited and at the same time too aloof, as far as appearances went, and Will had no choice but to convince her to have a cup of camomile tea with her medication.

"I was so happy today!" Mischa exclaimed before crawling under Will's bed.

"And it's lovely, Mischa, but now you have to rest," Will replied like a reasonable nanny he'd never been.

"So that you can snog my brother?" She asked wickedly.

"So that we can sleep too. I hate shopping." Will rolled his eyes.

"You loved every minute of it," Mischa said knowingly.

Hannibal was sitting on the bed, sad about not being allowed to help Mischa calm down and happy about being in Will's bed, especially having switched the sheets.

"I did. But now we all need to rest."

Will joined Hannibal and they collapsed on the same pillow tiredly.

"I could imagine a sexier setting," Hannibal mock-whispered.

"I could too, but not tonight," Will said in his regular voice.

For a while they lay next to each other. Then Will took a deep, steadying breath. "I'm going to the bathroom. I'm going to insert an oblong object into my arse. Make it all nice and open… Fuck, I'm bad at this. Come in in about ten minutes? If you let me bite your shoulder bloody, we can have a sexier setting. I'm terribly infatuated with you, Dr Lecter."

"I only live to help," Dr Lecter moaned.

Will went to the bathroom where he retrieved an oblong object which wasn't terribly gaudy to his senses. It came with a bottle of lube and step-by-step instructions printed out by Beverly, he assumed, seeing as it was printed in colour. It looked pretty on paper. It felt good inside Will once he got it inside and found his prostate with the help of another colourful manual.

"Stay tuned!" Will warned when Hannibal entered the bathroom - and not Will, who was getting impatient.

"Always, Will. I promise," Hannibal promised. He was promising a lot that night but Will chose to believe him, pushed against the shower wall and fucked well and tenderly into it as he was.

They kissed and they moved together, so well, so well… Hannibal had never given a single thought about being safe when being vulnerable like this - in love and happy. It said a lot about him that this was the first time he had been so but he didn't care. Will was clinging to him and whispering sweet and dirty nonsense into Hannibal's far too sensitive ears.

"How do you live like that?" Will asked, trembling in Hannibal's arms. "Feeling so much…"

Hannibal chose to kiss Will instead of answering him, and that was an answer enough.

They made their way back to the bed and fell asleep, sweaty and happy and so, so normal that for once they could entertain the notion of being normal. They laughed at it right before the sleep claimed them, one immaculate psychiatrist and one messy fisherman.

And Mischa was sound asleep under the bed.

***

The opera day came too fast for Will's liking but he accepted it all with grace. All of them clean and dressed to their nines, Will, Mischa and Winston drove to Hannibal's house in Baltimore for a so called light dinner of paella and wine. Mischa even took a sip under Hannibal's gaze. Winston got some more trippy sausage as a treat before he had his sign and paperwork clipped to his jacket.

They entered the opera house in sync, Hannibal's and Will's arms around Mischa. Winston kept close too. The dog had a feeling he wouldn't like Handel that much.

Alana took Hannibal aside the moment she saw him, thus leaving Will and Mischa to fight for themselves, which Hannibal didn't like one bit. Judging by Winston's angry looks, neither did he.

"They can handle it," Alana said rudely. "I need to talk to you about Margot."

"I can see those people being rude to my sister and my Will," Hannibal argued.

Alana sighed heavily. "He puts his cigarettes down into Margot's back. He breaks her bones. He hits her. She tried killing him, but she deserves to kill him and to live in luxury," Alana argued.

"Keep talking," Hannibal encouraged her.

"He's her brother. If he dies, in the absence of a male heir, the sole beneficiary is the Southern Baptist Church." Alana grit her teeth. Both she and Hannibal watched Margot protect Will and Mischa from some lazy and bored vultures.

"I can't watch her going on like that. She can't spend a night with me without a bodyguard showing up at my step and taking her away… But Margot still chooses to spend a night with

me.

"Even if she runs away, he'll come looking for her, and you know how it is, Hannibal. He's her family. I think a part of her still loves him. Still believes he's the only one who can keep her safe…"

"So that he can harm her all by himself," Hannibal muttered.

"Yes."

"Tell her to make an appointment," Hannibal turned to Margot, sharp and scary. "I wouldn't do a thing for a stranger, but there's much I would do for a patient. I'll have to talk to Will."

"He doesn't need to be a part of it…"

"Don't mother him, Alana. You don't know him at all."

Some journalists made a remark about Dr Lecter collecting strays. Some complimented Mischa's outfit, and Teen Vogue was among those.

Some noted that the performance was subpar. Those talked to Hannibal of course, but then again Hannibal spent most of the show watching Will and Mischa, watching their rapture break when some rumours somehow reached them. Yes, Hannibal made sure that neither the show, nor its attendants got the time of another day. All of them were there to impress him, and he wanted to see them fail and writhe at the feet of his brave boy and his braver sister.

He moved all of his appointments so that he could receive Margot as soon as she called. He had talked to Will beforehand too.

"He'll come for us," Will said pensively - and greedily. "We'll be ready, though. She'll be safe with us."

"I'll call someone too. My aunt's ward. She's an admirable sniper."

"Yes. That would be nice… And bloody. Oh, please, Hannibal, bring me blood. I don't like people like Mason Verger."

"I'll feed you so well, beloved," Hannibal promised. Mischa was between them, reading Silmarillion and rubbing her earlobes absentmindedly.

"What will you do, Will?" Hannibal asked in his most psychiatrist voice, just as Mischa winced at Feanor's arrogance.

"I will arm them all, all of my children with Molotovs and stones. I'll have Abigail dig quite a few traps. I'll have them all ready… I'll have Peter ready to take Mason himself out before he knows it. People like Mason never look out for people like Peter."

"Or you, darling."

"Or me. He'll be convinced, won't he?"

"I'll make sure of that, Will."

Chapter 9

Act 2: reconnaissance

Margot was remarkable. She spoke calmly and truly. There was no shame to her, and no fear in a way that Hannibal knew all too well from both himself and Will's kids.

"What do you think, doctor?" She asked with a sad smirk.

"I think you should kill your brother."

"That's… An unexpected reply from a psychiatrist."

"I aspire to provide my patients with unexpected solutions, especially those whom I'm honoured to get to know." Hannibal nodded at Margot. She seemed so shocked by the simple gesture of acknowledgement that she could only swallow.

"Alana said… But she's got a saviour's complex." Margot smiled softer.

"She does. I can and will help you, if you want me to, but it will be unexpected."

"Not to mention illegal."

"You need to take your life back, Margot, and I think the means of it are of no importance. Legal or not, your life belongs to you."

"Sounds nice."

"Then I take it you accept my help?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Of course you do."

"Sounds nice as well…"

They spoke for a few more minutes, then Margot stood up to leave and Hannibal walked before her to open the door, behind which an unpleasant, however good looking, man was sitting with a plastic, cruel grin on his face.

"Margot, dearest sister, I was worried sick! Why would you need a psychiatrist? I mean, you're pretty crazy, but I thought we didn't take the trash out publicly." He grabbed Margot's arm and pulled her close to him in a gesture of faux concern. Then he looked up at Hannibal.

"Something I need to know? Go to the car, Margot." Mason Verger dismissed his sister. She walked away calmly, a free and relaxed person.

"I can't disclose the content of our meetings," Hannibal replied. Mason offered him his hand and Hannibal pointedly ignored it. The lack of opposable thumbs made pigs poor

handshakers after all.

"I'm paying for those meetings," Mason insisted.

"Then I'll make sure to send you the bill."

"She's crazy, right?" Mason repeated, trying a different tactic. "She tried to kill me, you know?"

"I can't imagine why," Hannibal said.

"She needs a firm hand, my sister. She only has me to provide her with it. You think you could help?" Mason wiggled his eyebrows.

"I once tore a man's throat out with my teeth. I could certainly provide that," Hannibal confided evenly.

Mason burst out laughing. "You're a weird psychiatrist, Dr Lecter! I'm sure we'll have some excellent fun together. Just don't eat my sister without me."

"Pity, for I've been giving it some serious thought."

Mason laughed again and left. He wouldn't know what hit him if Hannibal had hit him now with a statue of a horse currently at hand, but Hannibal liked that statue and there were still things that Mason had to do before…

Hannibal closed his eyes and remembered a part of Will's plan. *I'll cut his ankles, take his clothes away and send him crawling through the woods. The spring is pretty cold this year, isn't it?*

It was a good plan, but Margot had to have a word in it.

Will was calling, so Hannibal had to wash his mouth and face before he replied.

"Hannibal, why is my kitchen being remodelled?"

"Oh, I thought it would be better if I cooked at your place."

"I'm not going to ask why you didn't ask me, because my kids are very supportive of a new kitchen featuring an ice cream machine, but! Hannibal, are you moving in with me?"

"Would you let me?" Hannibal asked because it was a polite thing to do.

"You switched my sheets and remodelled my kitchen. I think it's well past the point of asking me for my permission," Will said sweetly. "If you do it again, I'm going to bite your ear off. The left one. The more sensitive one. And take a bite out of your left cheekbone too." Will was breathing hard and seemed unhinged. Hannibal wanted him immediately without any pants. Or kids.

"Is it more sensitive as well, my darling?"

"No, but it's slightly off angle as opposed to the right one, and since it's the left one I think, traditionally, it's the one in the wrong. I think so because you're about to argue with me about it, you big creep. I miss you, get your arse home."

Hannibal put his phone back into a pocket. He looked around to make sure no one was watching, unless one counted the horse statue. And he did a pirouette.

***

"Why does your aunt have a sniper for a ward?" Will asked. Mischa was burning something excitedly - the budding arsonist turned successful pyrotechnician came for a visit and charmed everyone with his antics.

"She's a sportswoman, an Olympic champion too, but I think it sounds better if I point out that she's a good sniper. Always makes all the guests polite and cautious."

Hannibal turned to look at Will. Will was swooning. "I like you terribly much, Dr Lecter. What would you recommend?"

"An oblong object, Will. Up my bum."

"And what a bum it is," Will purred. Hannibal couldn't help but scratch behind his ear and call him a good boy. Will purred louder. "I'd bite it off."

"I'm looking forward to it," Hannibal replied.

A polite but judgemental cough interrupted their excellent flirting. Beverly crossed her arms and gestured at the kids a few metres away from them.

"I'm not kink-shaming you," she raised her hands for a moment to drive her point home and avoid being mauled to death by Will. Honestly, when she wished Will had got some action, she didn't mean that, but he looked happy. She just thought that no one had to hear it, because they were embarrassingly smitten.

"Thank you, Ms Katz," Hannibal thanked. "I say we're standing appropriately far from any sensitive ears."

"Not far enough from mine," Will argued.

"Mischa seems busy," Ms Katz nodded meaningfully. "Why don't you go and maul each other in Jimmy's bath house? He keeps some good oil there, if you catch my meaning… And they're gone."

***

Will tossed his clothes in every direction, while clinging to Hannibal for dear life and tearing his clothes off. Hannibal tried making a noise of protest.

"I'll mend them, I'm good with a needle," Will consoled him passionately. "Just want you naked and somewhere close."

"My dear boy…" Hannibal whispered to the accompaniment of his buttons rolling all over the place. "Should we indulge in a bath?" Hannibal nipped at Will's unshaved jaw and his tender ears and his lovely, lovely cheekbones, all angelic and pretty.

"We don't have much time," Will said, pushing Hannibal against the nearest wall and falling to his knees. Hannibal's right leg found itself hoisted over Will's left shoulder.

"Will, it's your bad shoulder… Ah…" Hannibal's thoughts followed his buttons as Will sucked the head of his cock into his mouth.

"It's ok if it hurts a bit. Want to feel you. Want you filthy, although you never are," Will explained before returning to his task.

The closest oil was coconut, and who would have thought that Hannibal Lecter, perfect and so strong and invincible, was allergic to it?

They landed on their arses in the tub after having a quick and medicinal wash.

"Did you adopt any of your kids?" Hannibal asked, his head on Will's shoulder. Their cocks lay disappointed and gloomy between their thighs.

"Just Abigail. Why?"

"Let's adopt them all, together. I'll sell my house, remodel yours - carefully and with your input. If you help me build a tiny house, I'd have an office here too. I don't want to spend a moment without you, Will. I've waited for you for too long." Hannibal leaned to kiss Will's temple.

"You could talk," Will held Hannibal tighter, closer to himself.

"I'm ten years older than you, my darling, clever, feral boy."

"I don't want to know how you found out about it," Will muttered.

"You must have found it out by yourself."

"I did."

"My good bad boy."

"Is it your way of asking me to marry you?"

"Perhaps. Are you amenable?" Hannibal looked at Will.

"Shut up," Will demanded. Hannibal could only sigh.

***

"Got any action?" Beverly asked, catching up to them on their way back to the house.

"An allergic reaction. Wouldn't have it any other way!" Will replied. Beverly only shook her head.

Back in their bedroom, Hannibal and Will discovered Jimmy installing something that looked like a capsule.

"What is that!" Will yelled.

"Oh, well, it's an old and broken hyperbaric chamber that I got through a friend. I think it would make a good bed for Mischa. It's totally safe. I experimented on Brian, because he's kinky like that." Jimmy blushed.

"This is a brilliant idea," Hannibal praised.

"I made it sound proof. And the windows," he gestured at the windows, "I've made them stained glass. So, even if Mischa awakes, she'll only see some murky figures moving sensuously on the bed…" He blushed harder. "Also, I checked the plans for the house, and if you want, well, if Mischa does, I can install it under your bed. It will require some pipe work to get around, but…"

"You experimented on Brian," Will finished.

"He's totally fine! Just kinky!" Jimmy explained.

"Who are we to judge?" Hannibal winced, suddenly aware of his still burning rectum.

***

Will had a proper dining room now, with a huge dining table that could fit everyone. The chairs weren't matching, he noticed, because some needed cozier chairs and some needed the most uncomfortable chairs to keep sitting and being stimulated enough to feel alive and present. Every child was accounted for.

"We're about to discuss something," Will announced after a scrumptious dinner, "and it's illegal. As you know, we can't call the police to help us, because we're the most suspicious bunch there is, save for Dr Lecter, but before we get married and adopt you all, we can't do much."

"Aw, you're getting married!" Someone cooed.

"That wasn't the most important part!" Will snapped. "If someone wants to leave, they should leave now, and no one will judge you."

"Can I recreate the ending of V for Vendetta, though?" The former budding arsonist turned successful pyrotechnician asked.

"No, Maurice, because it's not the right letter," Will replied.

"Oh, what is it then?" Maurice asked.

"It's *M,* " Hannibal said. "For us and for Mischa and for someone who needs your help."

"We're staying," Mischa said, and no one would argue with her.

"What is it?" Brian asked.

"It's a patient of mine. She's closely related to Mason Verger," Hannibal explained, or rather began to do so.

"He's a known pedophile," Brian interrupted.

"And known for his cruelty to animals," Jimmy winced. "Jack always hated that couldn't go after him."

"Legality never bothered Jack," Alana said from the entrance to the dining room.

"Dr Bloom, so kind of you to join us," Hannibal greeted. "I must argue, however, that you leave."

"No. I'm staying and I'm breaking every fucking law, fuck it!" Alana replied.

"Well, then why don't you sit by me?" Ada invited.

"If we shelter Margot," Will continued, but Hannibal held his hand. "Hannibal, it's no time to be ethical."

"Fair enough," Hannibal agreed and moved to remove his hand.

"No, you hold his hand, he's getting antsy when excited," Gill warned.

"If we shelter Margot, her brother and all his pigs will come for us," Will went on. "They'll come with guns and knives and trained bodyguards."

"But you have a plan, right?" Peter asked meekly.

"We do," Hannibal nodded.

"Wait, wait, wait, you have three FBI trained forensics here, not to mention Will," Beverly said. "We can… we can…"

"Drone driven shuriken!" Brian exclaimed.

"Drone driven anything," Jimmy corrected.

"Ok, they come in their bad big cars with their bad big lights on," Rachel suddenly said, and everyone stared at her. Mostly everyone got used to communicating with her non-verbally. "What? It needs to be talked through!" She argued.

"We're so proud of you," Will said. "But we'd have made an effort for you anyway."

Rachel shrugged and everyone moved on to avoid a meltdown.

"Some hallucinogenic mushrooms their way," Eldon began.

"Oh, I have some good stuff," Hannibal said. "But I'll buy some good mirrors anyway."

Everyone stared at him.

"It's from *Three Kingdoms*. An ancient Chinese novel. Goethe would have approved." Will looked at Hannibal and Beverly coughed.

"Ok, so we turn their lights against them and Eldon stuns them. What else?" Rachel looked up from her notepad.

"I think I could dig some traps for them," Abigail offered.

"Interconnected by some tunnels. It's easier with explosives," Maurice said. "And a wall of fireworks that will explode in an *M* , when they fire."

"I like that," Alana said.

"Mischa will stay with Chiyoh," Hannibal added.

"No, I will throw Molotovs!" Mischa argued.

"It could be therapeutic," Hannibal agreed, to Mischa's delight.

"With all the tunnels and traps and drone driven shurikens, I could take Mason down," Peter said.

"That's exactly what I want you to do," Will answered.

"I'd love to take down a bully," Peter said quietly.

"He needs to sign a different will," Hannibal reminded. "And we need to make it look like an accident during an illegal attack."

"There's no such thing as a legal attack," Gill said coolly.

"I absolutely agree," Hannibal agreed. "But I want Margot to be able to end him herself."

"Oh, of course," Ada nodded. "We'll have him all nice and ready for her."

"I still have my gun," Will said after a moment of silence.

"I have two katanas which I know how to use," Hannibal said.

"Oh, that's awesome!" Maurice was dangerously giddy. "You'll drag them alongside my tower of fireworks to light them. It's gonna be so pretty!" He rubbed his hands together.

Everyone nodded eagerly, most of all Hannibal.

"I'll talk to my family in Paris. They'll provide a press coverage of a century. They're very angry when it's family," Hannibal explained.

"Old European nobility here?" Alana scoffed.

"Yeah, with all the ideals and none of the privileges! Awesome!" Ada exclaimed.

"So, a week to get it all ready, and then I'm bringing Margot here," Hannibal concluded.

"Done!" Mischa again decided for everyone. She was a princess after all.

She ended up not liking her capsule bed one bit.

Chapter 10

Act 2: battle

"And this is where you defy your brother and make your pizza rectangular," Jimmy explained.

Mischa followed his instructions.

"You know, my brother once proved the Riemann hypothesis," Mischa said casually, while rolling up the dough.

"What?" Jimmy yelped and spilled all the tuna on the floor.

"Yes," Mischa continued. "And he did it very elegantly, even I understood it."

"Your brother proved… one of the, no, *the* mathematical problem?" Jimmy yelped again.

"Yes. But see, we're nobles, so he burnt his notebooks, just like Riemann, and we never talked about it again. Am I doing this right?"

"You're doing so well, sweetheart, I just need a seat," Jimmy said.

"Oh, I know, it's a big thing. But that's the whole point of nobility. We do such things easily, or as the Spanish say, *como si nada,* and then claim no credit for it. Hannibal is just an arse, so…" Mischa lazily rolled the rolling pin. "So he's just Count Lecter, and that's enough," she glared at Jimmy.

"I absolutely get it, in my own American way. Are you sure he burnt the notes? There's a million dollars on the line here."

"He has eidetic memory. We all do, it's a family thing." Mischa shrugged. "He wouldn't want you to claim the credit," she glared at Jimmy.

"No, no, Hannibal, I mean Lord forbid." Jimmy raised his hands in surrender and began scooping the tuna off the floor.

"He did," Mischa said sternly.

It was all calm, far too calm, Jimmy thought. Well, at least all the drama, well, most of the drama had been abandoned in the end, although Hannibal had bought a lot of mirrors anyway, thus allowing the entire household to make terrible jokes about sex and mirrors. Will even tried to fake a phobia of mirrors. It worked on Alana and didn't work on Hannibal. Will pouted much.

The tiny houses were covered by a lot of camouflage, courtesy of Hannibal. All the children were gathered inside the house, as were most of the animals. Peter wanted to bring *all* the

animals inside, and Will supported him, but after it was thoroughly proved that his doors couldn't let a horse in, Will had to give up and pouted some more. Hannibal promised him a renovation good enough for a horse.

Chiyoh barely introduced herself, had intense few minutes with Mischa and then perched herself on a strategically good tree with her gun. Mischa tried sneaking out with her and was thwarted by Ada, who told her, cryptically for Mischa and not so much for everyone else, that it was karma that Mischa was the one thwarted, for once.

Ada then used all the mirrors to cover all the windows with, which Will longingly praised. He too tried to perch himself next to Chiyoh, but Chiyoh pushed him off a tree, like the good sportswoman she was. Will limped back into the house. Hannibal cuddled him and avoided talking about Chiyoh or trees.

Maurice and Abigail had taken care of a proper fucking labyrinth around the house. Eldon planted some terrible mushrooms there. "Guaranteed to blow your mind," he singsang and creeped everyone out, as he usually did.

For now, all was quiet and intense, which was why Jimmy and Mischa were cooking. After all, regardless of any military plans, most people tended to get hungry and love pizza.

Jimmy sighed. Drone driven shurikens were abandoned too, unfortunately.

Maurice helped everyone cook a lot of Molotovs as a treat. Molotovs were poured into handmade Venetian glass bottles. Hannibal smiled like the devil himself. Happiness made him look not only irresistible - he looked invincible, far too perfect to be hurt or die or just plainly lose.

Oh, and Hannibal brought a lot of gas masks. Peter was wearing one right now as he was waiting for his chance to take down a bully. Cannibal the ferret was with him and no one could wish for a better bodyguard.

Jimmy occupied his mind with the Riemann hypothesis. And pizza.

***

"Have you been followed here?" Hannibal asked in his most psychiatric tone.

"Of course I was. What do you think?" Margot sat down and gratefully accepted a tumbler of whiskey from her super duper unconventional psychiatrist.

"In a few minutes, you'll leave this place the way you entered. There's a very, and I mean *very* ordinary car waiting for you outside. Once you're inside, you should do everything Ada and Gill ask of you. They're identical twins and very handy with guns. They'll drive you to a friend," Hannibal blushed. "To my husband's house. You'll be safe there."

"He'll come for Alana's place," Margot replied.

"Alana will be there too. Everyone is safe, and you will be safe," Hannibal promised.

"He'll come for your house, too," Margot warned.

"It doesn't matter. I have a few very angry teenagers there and they are not predisposed to leaving anyone… healthy."

Will's approach to the more murderous of his charges was to give them something nice to murder. Not nice as in nice; more like, nice as in totally despicable. It had to be worrisome how excited they were, but Hannibal found it beautiful.

"And… what will happen?" Margot asked cautiously.

"You'll be safe, Margot. And tomorrow morning you will be rich as well." Hannibal looked at his watch. "Now is the time, if you choose so."

"What's the alternative?" Margot scoffed.

"Whatever it is, you still have a choice, and no one will begrudge you for whatever choice you make. Just make it." Hannibal smiled like a murderer.

Margot stood up, took her fur coat and bag. "Will I kill him?" She asked.

"Of course you will. I won't have it any other way," Hannibal promised. "It's all about the doors now, Margot."

She looked at him, long and hard, and exited through the entrance.

***

The car was so ordinary, Margot didn't even catch the label.

"Hello," a tall burly girl said once she got inside. "I'm Gill. And this here is Ada," Gill nodded at Ada who was sitting in the backseat, gun at the ready. "Ada can't drive even if she's paid to do so," Gill explained.

"And you're straight," Ada grumped. "Hi, Margot. Stay put."

Gill pulled the car out of the parking lot.

Before long they were followed.

Margot suddenly heard a calm, accented voice coming from the phone on the dashboard. "A bit to the right," the voice said.

Margot looked back and saw that Ada was wearing a wicked pair of glasses. And carrying a gun.

"Yeah… like that?" Ada asked.

"A bit more. I don't like killing people…" The voice winced.

"Just putting them in danger, got it." Ada opened her window and leaned outside. "Now?"

"Yes, now seems like the optimal time… Yes… yes, and a bit to the left now. Shoot!"

Ada obediently fired her silenced gun. The car that had been following them screeched and swayed over until it was blocking the traffic, not that there was much of it at this hour, on this street.

"Beautiful," the voice praised. "Bull's eye. Now, a bit to the left again… Yes, that's it. Shoot and you'll disable their car forever."

"Perfect," Ada muttered.

"You're awesome," Gill reluctantly praised. She kept driving, fast and steady. Margot caught herself smiling.

***

They left the car in a field. Then Ada shot it, setting it on fire, while Gill led Margot through the woods into what appeared to be, at first glance, a quaint farmhouse.

It was warm inside. Margot was greeted with cheers, wine and pizza. She was offered a shower, a gun, a knife, a smoke (of both or either weed or tobacco) and a hug.

"I never talked," the girl who'd offered the hug said, "so my hugs are the best."

Margot gladly accepted it all; then Alana rushed in and took Margot away into a quiet and cozy room that smelled of them both.

"You can smoke here," Alana said through tears. "We can't open the windows now, but you can smoke here. Anything you want, really."

Margot smiled gratefully and immediately collapsed into the soft bed.

***

Meaning to scare and shock, Mason came with all his pigs, cars and bodyguards. The lights were reflected back on them, so the pigs stampeded into the wild, and the cars were suddenly on fire… It was a bit pretty, Mason would give them that, but in his mind it was all some parlor tricks. He had no idea about *Three Kingdoms* , or Hannibal trying to be legendary and succeeding.

Mason stepped forward and fell through the ground.

He could hear his men yelling and screaming; complaining they couldn't breathe, then swearing they could see their worst nightmare. It was all very loud for Mason, until everything was suddenly quiet, and a soft, pleading voice told Mason to move.

Mason moved. He was pushed inside something warm and wet, and stinky too. He was jostled, tossed and turned. But it was warm and wet, although it became difficult to breathe. It was still fun. It was amazing! He laughed and inhaled a mouthful of what he supposed was a pig's intestines. He coughed as he laughed. He felt just like daddy had wanted him to feel - filthy and powerful. Everyone was lesser. So he had been taught…

At some point everything stopped.

"Peter," an unfamiliar voice said with much admiration, "is Mason inside that pig?"

"It was sick and in pain," another voice, Peter presumably, explained. "And he needed to know how it feels."

"He did," said yet another voice, calm and this time, familiar. Margot's weird psychiatrist.

Mason giggled, but then he finally registered that no one giggled with him. And he paid those people to giggle when he did!

"Let him crawl out," the unfamiliar voice drawled. "Let him enjoy the bare necessities for once."

Mason wanted to laugh at that, but instead he inhaled a lungful of pungent stale air.

He moved and crawled and tore.

Someone grabbed him and dragged him along.

"Here. Feel the evening sir? Good. Now, sign here."

Mason looked up and saw a very pretty face. He preferred such faces long before they could grow a beard but that would do too. He giggled.

"Mr Verger, I'm afraid…" His attorney said, meekly.

Mason giggled again. He looked up - and stopped breathing. Now, that was bad, really bad. Margot was standing there.

"Margot… is it the time to ask what you want?"

"Oh, Mason… Margot wants you to breathe freely and be happy. Margot wants you to be able to live your life fully without Margot's craziness holding you down." Margot walked closer. Mason was suddenly aware of being sat on a windowsill, of the hard, cold night air biting at his numerous scratches and wounds.

"You need me," Mason sneered.

"I don't really, Mason, dear. The board prefers me anyway. And your attorney inhaled quite a lot of good stuff… You signed the new will, Mason, being so riddled with guilt and shame… I'm afraid you could do nothing but throw yourself out of a window."

Margot's beautiful, strong hands pushed all the air out of Mason's lungs and the last thing he knew was the hard ground under his back and the sniffs of his pigs coming closer and closer.

He sneered again - and then screamed.

Ada covered Mischa's ears but Mischa pushed her hands away. "Enough of that," Mischa demanded. "I want to hear him. I heard *them* too. I must tell Hannibal I love him terribly much."

"Yeah," Ada replied. "Yeah, you should."

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Out of ten, eleven.

Epilogue

The fireworks glimmered and boomed around, forming all kinds of letters but inevitably shifting into an *m.* As Maurice explained, it was to honour the *me* and *myself* in each and everyone around.

"Mylimasis," Hannibal whispered to Will. They were standing close, Mischa snuggled between them and honestly asleep, despite all the noise - besides the fireworks, there were all the cars Mason and his cronies had come in, that Margot told the kids to burn down. She helped, fierce and feral in her expensive clothes and with her perfect hair, while she poured gasoline over everything.

Since Chiyoh had nothing to do, she indulged herself by shooting down Mason's maneating pigs. It came in handy, because they needed the corpse or whatever was left of it.

Alana, Ada and Gill loaded the aforementioned cronies, high as fuck, into Alana's car and Will's truck and drove them to the nearest police station where they were dropped anonymously.

Eldon was sorry about his mushrooms being crushed to death by undeserving people, but on the bright side, he now had a full blown labyrinth to grow his fungi and muse about mycelium.

"What the fuck does that mean?" Will asked Hannibal once they tucked Mischa in and retired into her capsule bed. It could fit two grown men with some difficulty, but it was sexy, in a crowded, tuna can sort of way.

"Oh, by that you mean that? Well, it means *beloved* in Lithuanian," Hannibal explained. His mind wanted wild sex, his body wanted sleep.

"Hmmm… you know, I checked. There's no Lithuanian course on Duolingo. I'm disappointed." Will snuggled closer to Hannibal, not that there were many other options. Will wanted some wild sex too, but he wasn't needy or something. Or anything. He kept thinking about all the blood and gore and righteous violence. Of letting someone become the master of their fate, of helping Margot, of having his kids and his Hannibal close by.

"Why would you need that Chernobyl green owl when I'm right here?" Hannibal asked, offended.

"With you my phonetic practice will all be French." Will giggled at his own tremendous wit.

"Pardon?" Hannibal asked.

"Kissing. We'll just snog all the time."

"Oh… I'll have you know, Lithuanian phonetics can be very complicated. It won't be French kissing, Will. It will be Lithuanian kissing."

"Do you mean throat fucking?" Will asked to clarify, with his usual insight and lack of propriety.

"You know, Will, with anyone else, I'd have had to call my own therapist and talk to her about rude people being insufferable. But with you… With you I want to invent a new and scandalous way of kissing." Hannibal hummed tenderly into Will's hair. He didn't cough when he inhaled a mouthful of those, but it was a close thing.

"Throat fucking," Will corrected, gloatingly. "Are there many guttural sounds in Lithianian? I do hope there are… I'd love it if you…" Will's linguistic musings were interrupted by Hannibal giving him a sufficient demonstration of the Baltic phonetics.

"Not impressed," Will said, barely breathing. "More."

Hannibal leaned in for more, Will's hands were grabbing his arse and it was all perfect, but Mischa woke up with a scream, so both men relocated to the bed to comfort their brave girl.

"I forgot to tell you," Mischa confided sleepily. "I love you, Hannibal."

Will swore to Hannibal that he wouldn't tell anyone that Mischa's words made Hannibal cry. It was mutually assured, since Will cried too.

***

Come morning, before Beverly could say anything, Hannibal raised a hand.

"Ok, no questions asked," Beverly said.

"You will be wise to remain silent for the moment, Ms Katz," Hannibal warned murderously, melting Will's heart.

"Yes, leave them alone," Jimmy suddenly came to their defense. "They're parents!"

Everyone nodded wisely and Hannibal gulped down two cups of double espresso, which led Will down the rabbit hole of *if two cups of double espresso is quadrupled expresso, then what is three cups of double espresso?* He looked very sullen as he was thinking. Hannibal made him hot chocolate with extra marshmallows because he was a caring husband.

"If it ever happens again," Will whispered, sitting by Hannibal, "we kill them first. Long before they come like that." Will widely gestured around. Some cars were still burning.

"Of course, Will, I'll make sure of that," Hannibal promised again. He was so obliging! Will wanted to drag him somewhere without any kids. He loved his kids, but he loved Hannibal

too, and it was just too torturous!

***

The legal proceedings were left to Alana. Eldon came along to ensure everyone was up to the agenda with the help of fungi.

***

Mischa quite enjoyed Jimmy's way of education, mostly because in case of doubt she could remind Jimmy that her brother had proved the Riemann hypothesis.

She stopped sleeping under or on Will's bed, finally moving on and into her own room. Most nights she ended up in Will's bed, but Will and Hannibal learned to predict the hour of her visit, so that they could be sated, showered and dressed when she came over. It added a certain taste of danger to their *dalliances* . Will called it *fucks* , but Hannibal couldn't agree to that.

Ada officiated their marriage. No one else was home, she had made sure of that. She drove away afterwards as well. It was wise of her.

***

Hannibal's family in Paris adored Will. They just adored him. They never learned that it was all part of Hannibal's plan. Good for them.

***

Hannibal's tiny house was expensive and, according to Will, totally stupid. Who would ever want a tiny house with that much red wood?

But Hannibal's patients loved it.

***

The renovations were good enough for a horse.

End Notes

Thank you for reading. I love comments.

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